

## **Taking Good Care of Yourself**

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December 29, 2019

And [Jesus] said to [His parents], “Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?” (Luke 2:49)

As we look at the multitude of images of the infant Jesus that the Christmas season brings, we know that His birth was only the beginning of a long story. He was born into the world to become our Savior and Redeemer. The first step in this work involved Him learning everything that a normal human being needs to learn. His natural mind and memory were as empty of information as any of ours was when we were first born. He would have had to learn the words and meaning of human language. He would have learned how to walk and run. He would have had a time that He read each of the stories and passages of the Old Testament for the first time. Each day Jesus needed to consciously make choices that would have contributed to His becoming strong in spirit and filled with the wisdom. (cf. *Luke 2:40*). Concerning the Lord’s development, we are told:

He had, so as to become truly a human being, to be conceived, be carried in the womb, be born, be brought up and learn items of knowledge one by one, and by their means be brought into a state of intelligence and wisdom. Therefore in His Human He was a child like any other child, a boy like any other boy, and so on, the only difference being that He achieved that progress more quickly, fully and perfectly than others. (*True Christian Religion* 89)

Sometimes we might wonder who it was that taught him how to read or what He would have been like as an eight-year-old. But, for some reason, this has not been revealed to us. Of the Lord’s thirty years of preparation for His public ministry we are given only one short story that occurred when He was twelve years old. It is interesting in what it reveals about the relationship that Jesus had with Joseph and Mary who served as His parents.

Consider the events of that story. Jesus, at age twelve, causing significant anxiety to Mary and Joseph by remaining behind in Jerusalem, after a trip there to celebrate the Passover. His parents began their journey home assuming that He was part of the large group that apparently was traveling together back up to Galilee. It was only at the end of the first day’s journey that they realized that He was gone. They returned to Jerusalem to search for Him and had to look for three days before finding Him. He had stayed behind without telling Joseph and Mary in order to talk with the best scholars at the temple.

What do you think of this story? Why would He make a choice that would result in such worry for his parents? Mary asked Him this question “Son, why have you done this to us? We can imagine her saying to herself, “What were you thinking of? You weren’t thinking of us.” The implication of her words and these thoughts are that Jesus was thinking of Himself and His own needs, wants, and interests. What was His answer? “Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business.” He didn’t stay in Jerusalem on a whim. He had been listening and asking questions--learning. He had been feeding His mind by interacting with people who could give Him the best available human interpretation of the Old Testament books. He had been working on a key part of

his mission in life--His Father's business, His own business. He had been taking care of His own need to learn.

How well do we take care of ourselves? Many of us grew up being told of--and at times seeing for ourselves--the destructive evil within self-centered thoughts and concerns. We've been exhorted with the words: "Don't be selfish" and "Think about others." Learning not to be self-centered is an essential lesson. Much evil comes from exclusive self-love. But self-love can be misunderstood.

Consider how you were taught to care for things that had been given to you when you were young such as clothes, toys or a new bicycle. Take for example the care of tools. Many of us grew up in houses where there was a father who wanted us to not misuse, lose or even haphazardly leave around his tools. We were supposed to take good care of them. The same is true of good clothes we were given as children. They were not to be worn at the wrong time so that they were rapidly destroyed or stained so that were no longer useful as dress clothes. We know that the Lord does not want us to love clothes or tools in themselves, but rather we are to appreciate their ability to serve higher goals, to be useful.

Now consider that the Lord has given each of us a wonderful set of gifts. He has given us our natural body, our natural mind and our spirit. He has given them to us, and they are "ours." How well do we take care of these gifts? How well do we take care of ourselves? Consider the passage from *Divine Love and Wisdom* that was one of the lessons for this sermon (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 396): Through it the Lord speaks of us taking care of the welfare of our body by giving consideration to food, clothing, and housing. He speaks of being attentive to the welfare of our family, attentive to securing a good job, and even to being honored for what we do. He speaks of us taking time for recreation, worldly enjoyment. The Lord speaks to us of these things all for the sake of each of us being a more useful person.

In another part of the book, *Divine Love and Wisdom*, the Lord talks about things He has created for us--things that take care of our natural bodies, such as food, clothing, shelter, recreation, enjoyment and provide protection for us, community, country. (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 331) All of these allow us to be useful.

Consider that our natural bodies are tools or clothing for our spirit. Do we take good care of them? Most of us take reasonable care about what we eat and drink but could probably do better without becoming too obsessed with healthy food. We take reasonable care for staying warm and healthy. We take reasonable care for recreation, for sleep. We have to think of ourselves in all of these and we know it isn't evil. Taking care of ourselves is necessary for us to be useful.

Our natural mind is also a tool. It is affected by state of natural body. We know what happens if we do not get enough sleep or consume too much of the wrong food or drink. We are responsible to feed our natural mind in itself. Consider the following passage from the *True Christian Religion*:

In what way...each person ought to be his own neighbor can be seen from this analogy. Everyone ought to provide his body with food; this is the first consideration, but for the purpose of having a healthy mind in a healthy body. Everyone ought also to provide his

mind with the food it needs, such things as fall within the domain of intelligence and judgment, but in order that he may as a result be in a position to be of service to his fellow citizen, his community, country, the church and so the Lord. Anyone who does this provides well for himself for ever. (*True Christian Religion* 406)

Do you take time to feed your mind? Certainly, there are some who read too much or read rather empty material-- but this is not the norm. Yet for many of us reading can seem self-indulgent. We can wonder whether it is right to make time for it with everything else we have to do.

Likewise, do we take time to allow our mind to sort through experiences? This sort of reflection is an important part of learning from those experiences. As a comparison, consider that in the coming days most of us will make time to find proper places for new Christmas gifts. We want to put them in a place where they will be easily found, where they will be most useful. Reflecting on our experience is similarly a process of putting things in their proper place. When we allow time for our mind to reflect on ideas and events, we can see their true significance, how we might want to do things differently in the future.

The Writings are also very clear about the value of taking time for recreation, allowing refreshment from the press of our regular duties. If we don't make appropriate time for this refreshment, if we don't make time to care for ourselves, we will not be as useful to others.

The Lord also wants us to take care of our spiritual life and health. This takes time and conscious choices. One way to take care of yourself spiritually is by making time to read the Word and reflect on its meaning for your own life. It can mean taking time to read other books that help us better understand how the Lord cares for us, and our responsibilities in following Him.

Taking care of ourselves spiritually also means making time for prayer, for talking with the Lord about the important issues of our spiritual life. We can pray asking for strength, for insight. We can ask the Lord to guide us as we seek better self-understanding--so that we may see ourselves as the Lord sees us. There can also be value in taking time to explore questions and issues with friends.

Taking appropriate care of one's own natural body, mind, spiritual life may at times seem self-indulgent. We may feel that we are being self-centered when our choices to take wise care of ourselves results in negative responses from others. Like the example of Jesus staying in Jerusalem and causing Joseph and Mary great worry, it can seem to others like we are making the wrong choice. But apparently in the example Jesus' need to be about His business took precedence. It was not selfish because He was taking care of Himself for the sake of being useful.

It is not easy for us to find a balance of taking care of ourselves and be appropriately concerned with the needs of others. It is not a balance that we will be able to find once and for all, but rather will need to keep establishing repeatedly with the Lord's help. The evil spirits that seek to influence our daily thoughts and decisions love to have us be self-centered when this will be destructive, and they love to distract us from taking care of ourselves when this will keep us from being as useful as we could be. They love to distract us with the important issues of taking wise care of others and ourselves and turn our attention to the trivial and inconsequential.

As we begin a new year, think of the Lord inviting you to reflect on how well you take care of yourself and how He asks us to balance our caring for ourselves and others. It is a balance that we need to decide for ourselves. There are times when we should recognize that others needs and wants are not always higher than our own. Some of us need to beware of this more than others. If we always give of ourselves, no matter what the personal cost, we will be mistreating, misusing, even waste the wonderful gifts that the Lord has given us.

Today, in this coming week, and throughout this coming year, the Lord invites you to consider what you can do to better care for your body, mind and spirit. He invites you to this work not for the sake of yourself alone, but so that you can take better care of the gifts the Lord has given you-- so that you can better serve those around you. The Lord invites you to take good care of yourself so that you can better serve Him. AMEN.

Lessons: *Luke 2:41-52, Divine Love and Wisdom 396*

### **Luke 2:41-52**

Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast. When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother did not know it; but supposing Him to have been in the company, they went a day's journey, and sought Him among their relatives and acquaintances. So when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him. Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously." And He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them. Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

### ***Divine Love and Wisdom 396***

The love of self and the love of the world by creation are heavenly loves; for they are loves of the natural person serviceable to spiritual loves, as a foundation is to a house. For a person, from the love of self and the world, seeks the welfare of his body, desires food, clothing, and habitation, is concerned for the welfare of his family, and to secure employment for the sake of use, and even, in the interest of obedience, to be honored according to the dignity of the affairs which he administers, and to find delight and recreation in worldly enjoyment; yet all this for the sake of the end, which must be use. For through these things a person is in a state to serve the Lord and to serve the neighbor. When, however, there is no love of serving the Lord and serving the neighbor, but only a love of serving himself by means of the world, then from being heavenly that love becomes hellish, for it causes a person to sink his mind and disposition in what is his own, and that in itself is wholly evil.