

Taking Good Care of Yourself

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“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets. (*Matthew 22:37-40*)

Have you ever thought that life would be much simpler if you could completely forget about your own needs and wants and concentrate all your energies on the needs and wants of others? Certainly we all arrive at adult life with powerful inherited tendencies to be too self-centered and too concerned about natural things rather than spiritual ones. The Lord wants us to recognize the ways that these tendencies show up in our motives, thoughts, and actions. He wants us to seek His help in working to make other motives, thoughts, and actions the basis of our lives.

If we work with the Lord to have a love for Him and for our neighbor the guiding force in our daily thoughts and decisions, how will this affect us? Imagine that a woman has progressed in her regeneration or spiritual rebirth much, much farther than the vast majority of people achieve. She will have a tremendous amount of peace, trust, and strength in her life. She will do many things that truly serve the welfare of the people around her. Will she have completely forgotten about her own needs and wants? Probably much of the time they won't dominate her attention, but they will still be part of what she has to consider, and she will be aware of them--more so at some times than at others.

The Gospels record the words of a human being who progressed farther in regeneration than we could ever possibly achieve. Jesus, the Christ, inherited tendencies from His mother, Mary, that allowed the devils to try to lead Him astray. He had to battle these tendencies through times of temptation as you and I have to do. We have to fight our hereditary tendencies to believe that evil things are really good and desirable, to think false ideas are true, and to act from both of these. Throughout His life Jesus defeated the devils in every battle, gradually becoming more fully One with His infinite soul. At the end of His natural life when He had nearly completed this process of spiritual perfection, what do we see of His thoughts and concerns? In the Garden of Gethsemane, the night before His crucifixion, we know that He prayed: “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.” (*Matthew 26:39*) While He knew that it was absolutely essential that the sad and terrible events of the next day had to occur, He still did not welcome them with a part of His mind. He wished that the terrible temptations and battles could “pass” from Him. The Gospel of Mark records His state of mind that evening as follows: “He began to be troubled and deeply distressed. Then He said to [the disciples], ‘My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death.’” (*Mark 14:33-34*) The Gospel of Matthew records Jesus final words as being “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (*Matthew 27:46*) Even at the very end of His life, when He had nearly completed the process of becoming perfectly one with the love and wisdom of His inmost soul, the Infinite God, Jesus could not and did not forget Himself and could still feel despair and abandonment.

The Lord doesn't call us to forget ourselves. He calls us to be guided by what is good and true. He calls us to love Him, to love our neighbors as much as we love ourselves. He calls us to be wise stewards of the life, the gifts and talents He is formed within each of us, and our roles in the uses He has called us to serve.

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 important, even 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. We were not to lend them to someone else who will mistreat them or lose them. Even if the tool was our very own, we were expected to take care of it. We would get a strong negative response if we said, "It's my hammer, I can leave it out in the rain if I want." 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 opening line from the lesson from *Divine Love and Wisdom* for this sermon: "The love of self and the love of the world by creation are heavenly loves; for they are loves of the natural person that can serve spiritual loves, as a foundation is to a house" (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 396). 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, and 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 also provide protection for us, our community, and 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.

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

How we are to be neighbors to ourselves can be shown through the following analogy: We should all provide our bodies with food. This has to come first, but the goal is to have a sound mind in a sound body. We also ought to provide our mind with its food, that is, things that build intelligence and judgment; but the goal is to be in a state in which we can serve our fellow citizens, our community, our country, the church, and therefore the Lord. People who pursue this goal are providing well for themselves to eternity. (*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. On the other hand, for some 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? Most of us have recently made 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, and how we might want to do things differently in the future.

The Lord also wants us to take care of our spiritual life and health. This likewise 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 has created us, how He 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, and 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.

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 over and over again 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 from 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 wasting 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 that you can better serve Him. AMEN.

Lessons: Matthew 22:35-40, Genesis 1:26-31, *Divine Love and Wisdom* 396

Matthew 22:35-40

³⁵ Then one of the [Pharisees], a lawyer, asked *Him a question*, testing Him, and saying,
³⁶ "Teacher, which *is* the great commandment in the law?" ³⁷ Jesus said to him, "*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*" ³⁸ This is the first and great commandment. ³⁹ And *the second is* like it: '*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*' ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

Genesis 1:26-31

²⁶ Then God said, "Let Us make human beings in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." ²⁷ So God created human beings in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. ²⁸ Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." ²⁹ And God said, "See, I have given you every herb *that* yields seed which *is* on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food. ³⁰ Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which *there is* life, *I have given* every green herb for food"; and it was so. ³¹ Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed *it was* very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

***Divine Love and Wisdom* 396**

As for the love of self and love of the world being hellish loves, and why people could come into them and so destroy in themselves the will and intellect, the reason is that the love of self and love of the world are from creation heavenly loves, being loves of the natural self – serving spiritual loves, as foundations serve for the building of houses. For it is owing to his love of self and the world that a person is concerned for his physical well-being and that he endeavors to be properly nourished, clothed and housed, to take care of his household, to seek employments in order to be useful, indeed to be held in honor in accordance with the status of the business that he administers for the sake of being obeyed, and also to be entertained and recreated by delights of the world--yet all of these for the sake of an end, which ought to be useful service. For through these endeavors he is in a state to serve the Lord and to serve the neighbor. However, when he has no love of serving the Lord and serving the neighbor, and only a love of serving himself for the sake of the world, then that love from being heavenly becomes hellish; for it causes the person to immerse his mind and his heart in his own native self, which in itself is completely evil.