

The Essentials of Spiritual Growth

Philippians 1:9-11

Introduction:

“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, ¹¹ being filled with the fruits of righteousness which *are* by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

Paul is praying for the spiritual Growth

Gal.4:19

My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you, ¹

Eph. 4:11-15

And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, ¹³ till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; ¹⁴ that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, ¹⁵ but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— ²

Col. 1:28

Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. ³

² The New King James Version. 1982 (Eph 4:11–15). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ The New King James Version. 1982 (Col 1:28). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

II Peter 3:18

but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

4

Paul had a passion for the spiritual Growth of his people

This noted in his prayer life

Eph 1:15

Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, ¹⁸ the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power

5

Eph 3:14

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height— ¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. ⁶

Col. 1:10

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; ¹⁰ that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; ¹² giving thanks

⁴ The New King James Version. 1982 (2 Pe 3:18). Nashville: Thomas.

⁵ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Eph 1:15–19). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁶ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Eph 3:14–19). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.⁷

I thess 1:3

We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers,⁸

II Tim 1:3

I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as *my* forefathers *did*, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day,⁹

Philemon v4

I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers, ⁵ hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints, ¹⁰

And this I Pray

We need to understand at the outset that Prayer is a direct reflection of your Spirituality, The Priority of of your life, what is most important to you is reflected in our prayer life. What we pray about is what is important to you

Physical Needs vs Spiritual needs or Both

First We need to understand a couple of things about prayer

1. It is a duty

Phil 4:6

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;¹¹

Rom 12:12

rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer;¹²

⁷ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Col 1:9–12). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁸ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (1 Th 1:2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁹ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (2 Ti 1:3). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁰ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Phm 4–5). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹¹ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Php 4:6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹² *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Ro 12:12). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

I Peter 4:7

But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. ¹³

Luke 18:1

Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, ¹⁴

2. Prayer should be Compulsion Passion

Psm 55:1

Give ear to my prayer, O God,
And do not hide Yourself from my supplication.

² Attend to me, and hear me; ¹⁵

Psm 61:1

Hear my cry, O God;
Attend to my prayer.

² From the end of the earth I will cry to You,
When my heart is overwhelmed; ¹⁶

Psm 119:58, 145

I entreated Your favor with *my* whole heart;
I cry out with *my* whole heart;
Hear me, O Lord! ¹⁷

Acts 9:11

So the Lord *said* to him, “Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for *one* called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. ¹⁸

Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:6

¹³ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (1 Pe 4:7). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁴ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Lk 18:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁵ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Ps 55:1–2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁶ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Ps 61:1–2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁷ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Ps 119:145). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁸ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Ac 9:11). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!” ¹⁹

I Thess 3:10

night and day praying exceedingly

I Tim5:5

Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. ²⁰

Prayer is a Duty and a compulsion

Generated by the Spirit of God

Priority of the the First church

ACTS 6:4

but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” ²¹

There 5 things that are essential for Spiritual Growth

love, excellence, integrity, good works and glory.

I. Love

A. The issue of love is well known to us and was, of course, in much of what Paul wrote. In his introduction to the Ephesian letter he talks about love. In his introduction to the Colossian letter he talks about love. In his opening in 1 Thessalonians he talks about love. In his opening in 2 Thessalonians he talks about love. And a lot of other places he talks about love.

B. Col 3:14

C. I Cor. 13

¹⁹ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Ga 4:6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

²⁰ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (1 Ti 5:5). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

²¹ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Ac 6:4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

love is the surpassing virtue. It is the most essential factor in spiritual life

1. Divine Love,

a. Rom 5:5

b. Gal. 5

- i. He's not asking you to stir up your human love, he's not asking the Philippians to try to be more sentimental, more emotional, more sensitive to people on a human plane. That is not the idea at all. He is asking God to grant them more and more abounding love from His own resource. It is divine love...the kind of love with which God loves, with which Christ loves.

2. Defacto Love Its is present

- ii. [1 John 3:14](#) We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love *his* brother abides in death. ¹⁵ Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. ²²
- iii. John 13:34-35 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” ²³

2. Rignald Niber(??) the German theologian said on one occasion, "The church reminded him of the ark, you couldn't stand the stink inside if it weren't for the storm outside.

²² *The New King James Version*. 1982 (1 Jn 3:14–15). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

²³ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Jn 13:34–35). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

3. Decisive Love Love of choice or will Agape

It is the love of choice and the love of will that says I will love you whether you're my friend or my enemy, I will love you whether you do good or evil, I will love you whether you can give me anything or take away everything, I will love you. And Jesus defined it when He said, "Greater love hath no man than this, than that a man would lay down his life for his friends." It's sacrificial love. It's the love of choice. It's the love that chooses to love the unlovable, the unlovely, it's a choice. And you have to make that choice over and over again. I've said to myself many many times, "I will choose to love that person no matter what they do....I will choose to love that person no matter what they say...I will choose to love that person no matter how they might hurt me." It's the love of choice. And it's a love that expressed in meeting a need, doing a deed of kindness, caring for someone in a practical way...humbly serving others. That's the kind of love it is.

It's not the love of a feeling, it's the love of action. It is not really an emotion although emotion will come along. If you read 1 Corinthians 13, the greatest chapter in the Bible on love, love is described. It says, "Love is patient, love is kind, is not jealous, love does not brag, is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly, it does not seek its own, is not provoked. Does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." Every single one of those is a verb in the Greek. Love is an action. Love is a series of actions. It is not a static attitude. It is what you do, not what you feel. It is what you say, not what you think. It is action. It is the love that reaches out to meet a need. And Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself," and the question came. Who is my neighbor? And Jesus told the story about a man lying in a road with a need and said, "That's your neighbor. Anybody you come across with a need." This is the love of the will. This is character that says no matter what you do, who you are, I will sacrificially serve for your good and your blessing.

Romans 5:8

4. Dynamic Love

abounding growing love, More and more Present tense verb.

Ephesian 4:32

And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

5 Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. ² And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God²⁴

In real Knowledge,

Love is not a uncontrolled emotion

It is linked with truth. epignosis

It is controlled by truth from Scripture.

I Peter 1:22

Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, ²⁵

5. Discerning Love

_____Greek word, aisthesa, I should say, which we get the word aesthetic from. It is the only time this word is ever used in the Scripture and it means insight or perception. It has to do with moral perception, moral insight. People say, "Love is blind." Love is not blind, not biblical love.

²⁴ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Eph 4:32–5:2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

²⁵ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (1 Pe 1:22). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Biblical love is very insightful, very perceptive. It knows exactly what is right and what is wrong, what is false and what is true, and it can make the right application at the right moment in life. It is that serving sacrificing humility which meets the needs of others as it sees and ascertains and understands them.

William Hendrickson, for example, wrote, "A person who possesses love but lacks discernment may reveal a great deal of eagerness and enthusiasm. He may donate to all kinds of causes. His motives may be worthy and his intentions honorable, yet he may be doing more harm than good."

Let me bring it Home for us

"During World War II orphaned babies were placed in a large institution. The accommodations were pleasant, new furniture, brightly covered toys, delicious food, nevertheless the health of the children began to rapidly deteriorate although there were no signs of disease. They stopped eating and playing. They then grew weak and began dying. These are new born babies. United Nations doctors were flown in to investigate. Their prescription. For ten minutes each hour all children were to be picked up, hugged, kissed, played with and talked to. The orders were obeyed and within a short time the strange epidemic disappeared. The little ones brightened. Their appetites returned. Their toys were once again played with. And when their ten minutes came, they enthusiastically reached out their little arms to be picked up by the approaching nurses.

"The doctors identified their fatal lethargy as *mirasmus* and described it as a mysterious and gradual emaciation of the body which seems to strike when others don't take time to show enough love," "The same principle holds true for the elderly. Social disengagement leads to loneliness and eventual death. Our senior citizens feel the effects of such isolation perhaps more than any other group in our society. No doubt that is why senility is so prevalent and why...get this...post retirement life averages four years. The cry of most older people was voiced to me by my father shortly after his

retirement. `Son, you can criticize me, accuse me, borrow from me, make fun of me but just don't ever leave me alone,'" end quote.

James J. Lynch(?) researched the lives of seven thousand persons aged 30 through 69 for a period of nine years. His conclusion is that outgoing socialable individuals live longer and healthier lives than those who are shut off from others. The former are more resistant to heart and circulatory diseases, cancer and strokes and are even less inclined to suicide. People refer to this phenomenon in many ways, assimilation, systemics, linkage, social webbing, or fellowship, it all comes down to one important idea, we're all born with an insatiable inner need for meaningful inner action with others. The need begins on the first day of our lives and continues until we breathe our last breath."

You see what we're saying? God made us to be utterly fulfilled in the loving environment of the church. You say, "Well now wait a minute. We have our little group." I'm sure you do. "We have our little web of friends." Let me talk about that for a minute. Again you know what goes into action, the law of entropy and start...things start to disintegrate. You start out with this wonderful loving fellowship and you think it's agape love and you're enjoying it and as you get into a little more, your little webbed in group begins to develop standards. And with those standards you web in some and you web out others. And if they don't fit the standard, they don't get in. And so you've got your little group. The worst of it is nepotism, where the little group is all in the same family. But there are other forms of it such as cronyism where you have your pals and your buddies. It's a little small work...network of people that you associate with all the time. You deeply care for them. They deeply care for you. They're like extended family. There's the little web that you fit in. You get strokes there. You feel secure there. You even feel flattered there. You are accepted with no risk. Everything is absolutely predictable. In fact, the conversation is usually the same every time you get together. You never involve yourself with unpredictable people, you never get into any risky deal. You never allow low status outsiders into your little web and you say that's love. And may I suggest to you that the higher the comfort level of your web, the higher the walls that keep other people out. That's right. The higher the comfort level of your web, the higher the walls that keep other people out. And usually there's a part of your little web that talks about the people on the other side of the wall and how they would never fit into your group. But you feel good

about your little web and you call it love and you totally ignore maybe real love.

How we need to reach out beyond that kind of confinement and work to show love to all those who come into our path, no matter what the risk might be. And I guess you could say you've arrived at a certain point in this when you look to God alone for your reward. You can tell when you're really building relationships on the right level when you never look for anything from the relationship but you look to God for the reward. That's a focus you need to have.