

Developing a Loving Heart

Having a loving heart takes time, effort, patience and sometimes involves pain.

Yet we are told in the Christian Bible that we must never stop loving.

True life is to have a loving attitude.

Anything outside of that loving relationship, with God and other people, is only existing, not living.

1 Corinthians 13:7-8 [Living Bible] *“If you love someone you will be loyal to them no matter the cost. You will always believe in them, always expect the best of them, and always stand your ground in defending them ... love goes on for ever.”*

1 Corinthians 13:7 [Phillips Translation] *“Love knows no limit to its endurance, no end to its trust, no fading of its hope, it can outlast anything.”*

Sometimes we are so exhausted physically and mentally that we feel we have no more love to give, for to be loving is exhausting.

Those who have been parents of hyperactive young children or who have cared for physical or mentally handicapped children know how exhausting loving can be.

Knowing and caring for our handicapped grandchild, Rachael, has been a great blessing to my wife and I. We have both learnt many things from her by having willingly laid down our lives for her welfare.

To experience her joy in small things was a shining example to us and others who are not held down as she was by her massive handicaps. But lovingly caring for her extensive needs was exhausting.

If we work in “*people intensive*” jobs, nursing, waiting, counselling, etc., we know what it is like to come home after work and feel so exhausted we don’t want to face another person and their needs.

What are the secrets of lasting love?

How can we fulfil the demands of everlasting love as described in 1 Corinthians 13:7?

How do we love over the long haul without running dry?

What is the source of long lasting love?

Our love soon runs dry; where can we tap into eternal love?

In long distance relationships, to make the love in that relationship last we need to refuel our love. We don’t have enough love in our own nature to complete a lifelong loving relationship.

We need to know how to refuel the love in our lives.

Society is littered with crashed and burnt-out relationships that did not know how to refuel the love in their relationship.

The secrets of lasting love

1 Develop habits that refresh us physically.

Our physical condition has a strong influence on our ability to have a loving relationship. **It is hard to be loving when we are physically tired.**

All that some struggled marriage relationships need is for both partners to get some physical rest from their hectic day after day pressured lifestyle.

It takes energy to even listen to the needs of other let alone fulfil them.

Little problems take on mountainous proportions when we are physically tired.

We are more defensive, critical and hostile when we are physically tired.

Warning signs that tell us we are heading for a relationship that is lacking the much needed love.

- a) Always feeling fatigued.
- b) Feel too tired to care for others' needs.
- c) Depending on stimulants to keep going.

If we relate to these signs in our lives we need to take immediate action to restore that loving feeling to our relationships.

Suggested action to refresh us physically

There is nothing new about these suggestions. We all know of them, we just need to apply them in our lives.

a) Ensure we have adequate rest

Psalm 127:2 [Living Bible] *“It is senseless for you to work so hard from early morning until late at night ... for God wants His loved ones to get their proper rest.”*

Rest is so important that God included it in the Ten Commandments. If we are not taking a day off from work every week we are breaking God's Law that He gave mankind to live a happy and fulfilled life.

Sometimes the most spiritual thing we can do is to get some extra rest.

It is amazing how much better situations appear after a good night's sleep. Many of us become too tired to love our family, the basis of the problem is physical not mental or spiritual.

b) We need a regular and balanced diet

Psalm 119:73 [Living Bible] *“You made my body Lord, now give me the sense to heed Your Laws.”*

We all know what and how much we should be eating to keep our bodies healthy and strong, it is just a matter of doing what we know.

c) **We need regular exercise**

1 Timothy 4:8 [Good News Bible] *“Physical exercise is of some value...”*

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 [NIV] *“Do you not know that your body is a temple 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 honour God with your body.”*

We honour God when we keep our bodies healthy and strong through regular exercise.

Our bodies were designed to be active on a daily basis as the normal lifestyle was at the time in history when the Bible was written. Today the lifestyle of many of us lacks the regular exercise during our working day. We use a car or public transport going to and from work, and most of our working day is spent sitting or standing, while mechanical tools perform all the physical labour.

One person commenting on today’s lifestyle said *“whenever we get the urge to exercise we lay down until it goes away.”*

There is really only two choices in life, fatigue or fitness, because regular exercise generates extra energy.

2 We need to develop habits that recharge us emotionally

When our emotional tank is empty we are unable to continue being a loving person, we just stop being loving.

We understand the signs that tell us we need to eat or rest, but we seem to overlook the signs that we need recharging emotionally.

What are the signs of emotional emptiness?

a) **We have a sense of being overwhelmed**, we feel inadequate for all the demands being made on us.

b) **We have outbursts of impatience**, most of the time we can patiently wait for our needs from others to be fulfilled. When emotionally empty we find ourselves exploding with impatience with those we love the most.

c) **We have this desire to avoid other people.** We begin to see other people as problems not persons whom God loves and we should also love.

d) **We have these dreams of “getting away”.** The escape fantasies we all have had at times. Mine is that cabin by a lake in the outback of British Columbia, where the only sound is the cry of the loon and the breeze in the trees. I’ve never been to Canada, I’m glad I haven’t because the reality would destroy the *“getting away dream”!*

We are not alone in this desire to escape reality.

Psalms 55:4-8 [Living Bible] *“My heart is in anguish within me. Stark fear overpowers me. Trembling and horror overwhelm me. Oh for wings like a dove to fly away and rest! I would fly to the far off deserts and stay there. I would flee to some refuge from all this storm.”*

King David had dreams of escaping from reality.

When our emotional tank gets low it is going to show.

What is the suggested action we take to renew ourselves emotionally?

a) We need to find a place of solitude

Mark 6:31 [Living Bible] *“Then Jesus suggested, Let us get away from the crowds for a while and rest, for so many people were coming and going that they scarcely had time to eat.”*

We need time alone. Jesus frequently withdrew from the crowds to be alone to recharge His emotional tank.

A person who is available all the time is not worth anything when they are available.

We either come apart for a while or we “*come apart*” in our emotional responses.

Many of us have so many “*irons in the fire*” that we are putting out the fire.

b) We need to find time for recreation

Matthew 11:19 [Phillips Translation] *“Jesus came enjoying life.”*

Recreation is not physical rest. There are certain tasks that we can perform that will recreate us as balanced personalities.

If our work is mostly at a desk using our mind constantly, then engaging in a physically orientated job of work like gardening will restore us emotionally.

I know my father used gardening to restore emotional balance to his life which was full of meeting people’s needs hour after hour.

After such balancing work we feel good and are ready again to face the pressure of providing the needs of others.

We all have different pursuits that recharge our emotional tank because we are all shaped differently emotionally.

We all have different activities that we find to be relaxing; hobbies, sport, crafts, etc.

We need to find out what recharges us emotionally and build that into our life on a regular basis.

In general, if we work with our minds we find work with our hands restores our emotional tank. If we work constantly with our hands then just using our mind in study will refresh us emotionally.

The more we are involved in helping other people the more our need is for “*playtime*”.

Real ministry to others costs and exhausts.

We cannot give out to that extent unless we are being recreated on a regular basis.

c) We need to develop the habit of laughter

Proverbs 17:22 [Good News Bible] *“Being cheerful keeps you healthy.”*

Proverbs 14:30 [Living Bible] *“A relaxed attitude lengthens a man’s life.”*

When we laugh it stimulates our immune system that aids our healing and resists infection.

Laughter is a gift from our Creator. God has a sense of humour, He created us didn't He!

We should **not** take ourselves seriously.

God is the only One we take seriously.

We should laugh at our own humanity with all its weakness and inconsistency.

3 We need to develop habits that renew us spiritually

1 Corinthians 13:8 [Living Bible] *"Love goes on for ever."*

Humanly this is impossible, we need to receive spiritual strength from outside of ourselves to continue to love in the way we have been learning.

What are the warning signs that we need to be renewed spiritually?

a) Nothing seems worth the effort involved

We ask ourselves why am I doing what I am that is eating up so much of my time? I thought it was a good idea when I started, that it would be helpful to other people, be a *"light"* to them, but is it worth all this effort?

b) Life seems futile, purposeless

When we are spiritually low we lose sight of our main goal in life. Becoming like Jesus Christ seems so far away, and we seem to be making such slow progress towards that goal, if we are moving at all.

c) We begin to blame God for our problems

Why has this happened to me, God? You could have stopped it. Why didn't you, God?

If we are honest, we realise we brought the problem on ourselves by our lack of godly wisdom.

Many of the great men of the Bible blamed God for their condition when they were in the final stages of *"spiritual burnout"*. God knows this can happen to us also.

d) We find ourselves worrying about most things that happen to us

Proverbs 4:26 [Living Bible] *"Consider well the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established and ordered aright."*

God wants us to meditate on what is happening to us in our life and where our actions will lead us.

But to worry is a negative type of meditation where we are not including God in the *"frame"* of circumstances and their outcome.

Worry is a sure sign that we need to be spiritually renewed.

What are the suggested habits that we develop to ensure we do not dry up spiritually?

a) We need a daily “quiet time”

1 Timothy 4:7 [Phillips Translation] “Take the time and trouble to keep yourselves spiritually fit.”

We need to set aside time every day to spend with our Creator, not being distracted by the needs of others around us that we face the rest of the day.

We use that time to listen to God talking to us through His Word, the Bible, and we talk to Him in prayer.

2 Corinthians 4:16 [Amplified Bible] “We do not become discouraged, utterly spiritless, exhausted and wearied. Although our outer man is progressively decaying and wasting away, yet our inner self is being progressively renewed day after day.”

From my end of the spectrum of life I can appreciate that my body is decaying. I do not function as well as I did only 10 years ago. Yet as a result of a regular daily “quiet time” with my Creator I have never felt so spiritually strengthened.

1 Peter 5:7 [NIV] “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”

I do now cast on my God all my anxiety and cares for having spent regular time in His special presence.

I know that He loves me and is going to care for me.

Job 7:17-18 [Amplified Bible] “What is man that You should magnify him and think him important? And that You should set Your mind on him? **And that You should visit him every morning, and try Him every moment?**”

I call the place where I meet with my Creator God my “place of peace and productivity”. I feel we all need such a place in which to mature spiritually and to experience the love of God and the peace of mind that His love brings to us.

I say this out of personal experience, and don't know of anything else that will help us more to mature and be renewed spiritually.

Excerpts from other people's testimonies who have a regular “quiet time” with God every day.

“The daily habit of starting my day with God in prayer and Bible study is the single most important thing that I do for myself and my family. I ask for God's power every morning to enable me to be who He wants me to be, and I receive His peace and confidence to go forward each day knowing that I will not walk alone.”

“My time with the Eternal each morning sets the pace of my whole day.”

“My quiet time helps me keep the everyday events of each day in proper perspective. It keeps me focused and on track.”

“When I started each day with a quiet time, the rest of the day seemed to be less stressful, for God's Peace takes over.”

“My quiet time is the fuel I need to keep going, and the balance I need to avoid stumbling during the day that follows.”

“Each day I am reminded and renewed by the love God has for me, I enjoy reading the Bible because I am excited to be able to know Him more as time passes.”

“My quiet time always puts into perspective God’s purpose for eternity instead of focusing on my little temporary world, making it easier to absorb the hurts and disappointments of this society that may come into my life during each day that follows.”

“When I’m inconsistent with my quiet time over a short period only I know about it. When I’m inconsistent over a longer period of time everybody knows about it by my response to testing situations.”

To start with our quiet time may only be 5-10 minutes but we will begin to experience such inner joy and fulfilment. Soon we will find an hour will feel too short a time. I can testify to that experience, and those who know me personally realise I live a very full working day, and constantly find myself under stressful pressure.

b) We need to join a small group of like-minded Christians

Hebrews 10:25 [NIV] *“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-- and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”*

We all need the encouragement that comes from fellowship with other Christians. A group where we can spend time with each other to get to know one another building and strengthening friendships.

John 7:37-39 [Amplified Bible] *“... if anyone is thirsty, let them come to Me and drink”* [this we do in our “quiet time”] *“... he who believes in Me, who cleaves to and trusts in and relies on Me, as the Scripture has said, out from his innermost being springs and rivers of living water shall flow continuously. He was speaking of the Holy Spirit, Whom those who believed, trusted and had faith in Him were afterwards to receive.”*

The renewing we receive during our “quiet time” by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit has to flow out from us in loving fellowship with others.

The Holy Spirit will never stagnate, we cannot “bottle up” God’s love, it has to flow out in loving relationships with others. For us to receive more of God’s love we have to let it flow out from us to others.

A Christian without such a family is an orphan.

c) We need to worship our Creator God

Psalms 59:16 [NIV] *“But I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble.”*

Singing our praise to God is one way we worship our Creator. Many of the psalms are songs of praise and thanksgiving to the Creator God.

Ephesians 3:18 [Living Bible] *“... may you be able to feel and understand, as all of God’s children should, how long, how wide, how deep and how high His love really is, and to experience this love for yourselves...”*

As we worship God in song and praise Him for His gracious love, we do experience that love and fellowship.

John 4:23-24 [NIV] *“Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and*

his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”

Romans 12:1 [NIV] *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, **this is your spiritual act of worship.**”*

As we yield our whole life to God we will experience His love for us and such an act is real spiritual worship on our part.

For some time now I have each day laid down my life as a living sacrifice before God's throne, offering back to Him, to use as He wishes, what He has given me in the first place.

This is nothing to boast about, I am no spiritual giant. Far from it, I only wish I had been given even more that I could offer back to the One who has loved me so greatly and been so merciful to me, forgiving my many sins.

But this simple act of worship has transformed my life.

Philippians 4:12-13 [NIV] *“I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”*

God has taught me contentment.

Having fellowship with Him has convinced me that I am blessed with far more than I could ever deserve, and that I am loved with an everlasting, unconditional love.

It is that everlasting love that “*rubs off*” on me when I am in fellowship with Him. With Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit Whom He sent to dwell always with us and at times in us when we don't grieve Him.

Not grieving the Holy Spirit is also an important part of developing a loving heart.

I feel we have together learnt plenty enough to make a very good start towards having a loving heart similar to that of our Creator God.

Let us now apply what we have learnt and then God will reveal what He wants to achieve in us in the future by our yielding to His moulding as the Master Potter.