

Without the assistance of that Divine Being. . . I cannot succeed; with that assistance, I cannot fail.

--Abraham Lincoln

Principle Nine

PARENTS HAVE A RIGHT TO DIVINE STRENGTH OF THE SPIRIT

We live in a time when many couples are choosing not to have children. I recently spoke with one such man; he said, "My wife and I have decided not to have children because we're afraid that they might not turn out right. I guess we've watched the suffering my parents have gone through over my brother, and I just don't want to have to go through that. It seems to me that it's just too much responsibility."

Parenthood is an awesome responsibility. There are times when I stand awe struck at the responsibility that I have as a Mother: the awareness of my weaknesses and inadequacies sends me spiraling down into despair until I realize that I am not alone, and that in my calling as a mother there are resources available to me.

In my experiences as a parent I have: received promptings that have protected the physical or emotional safety of a child, been given insight or understanding into a child's needs, been comforted in times of discouragement. All of these and more are available to any parent who seeks them. The writings of the Founding Fathers overflow with acknowledgement of the hand of God in the success of the Revolutionary War and the formation of the Constitution. It was during the heated--physically and emotionally--debates of the Constitutional Convention that Benjamin Franklin said,

In this situation of this Assembly, groping as it were in the dark to find political truth, and scarce able to distinguish it when presented to us, how has it happened, Sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of lights, to illuminate our understanding? In the beginning of the contest with Great Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayer in this room for the divine protection. Our prayers, Sir, were heard, and they were graciously answered. All of us who were engaged in the struggle must have observed frequent instances of a superintending Providence in our favor. To that kind of Providence we owe this happy opportunity of consulting in peace on the means of establishing our future national felicity.

And have we now forgotten that powerful friend? Or do we imagine that we no longer need his assistance?

I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth--that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid?

Who more than parents needs an illumination of understanding? And who more than parents needs a powerful friend? If God notices and is concerned with even the sparrow, surely he will assist parents in their desire to do well with their children. It is only logical that if the parent is representing, as his steward, the interest of a loving Father in heaven, he will not be left without that Father's assistance. As parents our vision is limited, our understanding is limited, our love and patience and tolerance are limited; but as his representatives we have a right to counsel with him whose vision and understanding are limitless and whose name is love!

It seems, then, that there are specifically two areas in which we desperately need the assistance of Heavenly Father: first, in the rejuvenation of our spiritual energy, whereby our hearts are made alive with qualities of love, patience, and goodwill; and second, in

direction for specific situations and the general illumination of wisdom and understanding. This discussion focuses on the first of these areas; the next principle treats the second.

The Rejuvenation of the Human Spirit

In this day of physical fitness, it is good to remember that just as the body needs to be nourished--with proper foods, rest, and exercise--in order to maintain optimum vitality, so also does the mind and spirit of man. Sluggishness of the body results in physical weakness; indolence of the mind causes lethargic thoughts; an unfeeling heart leads to a deadening, comatose existence. All three need nourishment, and with that nourishment they will grow and flourish.

Love

In today's world there is a prevailing idea that we are helpless victims in the face of love, that it comes and goes not at our will but at the whim of fate. Some find themselves falling in and out of love with no thought that they have any control at all. If this were true, there could be no valid marriage contract or lasting commitment in families, for there could be no hope or guarantee that the binding force of love would last.

Many couples are choosing not to marry at all because of the notion that: love controls, and cannot be controlled. We may teach our children that there are no monsters, but there are: they are the untruths that masquerade as truth!

Parental love is the motivation for virtually all that the parents do, for all their sacrifice and service. Without it, the duties of parenthood seem merely a chore; but with it they are cloaked in enchantment. Listen to the new mother--Oh, I can't wait for the baby to wake up!--or the father, "Look at the mess Johnny made--isn't that cute?"

A parental heart that is full of love will be vibrant with warm feelings, will laugh at a child's antics, will discipline with optimism and hope, will have confidence in a child's motives, will be patient--though not to the point of indulgence--and will correct without laboring criticism. In short, the parent with a full heart will have the virtues of faith, hope, and charity. On the other hand, a heart that is empty of love will likely be indifferent, without feeling, nervous and irritable, of sour nature, discouraged, destructive in disciplining--in short, without faith, hope, and charity.

It is always interesting to me that there are those who prescribe communication as the remedy for all the problems in marriage and family; but without love, increased communication can heighten the contention rather than decreasing it. Lips cannot sweeten, without guile, the sour motives of the heart. The heart must be sweetened first.

“Souls are made sweet not by taking the acid fluids out, but by putting something in--a great love, a new Spirit . . . interpenetrating ours, sweetens, purifies, and transforms all.” (Henry Drummond, *The Greatest Thing In The World*)

The Source of Love--the Spirit

Just as there is an energy source--the sun--available to give life and light to the earth, so there is an energy source--the Spirit of God--which can give life, light, and love to the human soul. Through its influence all the faculties of body, mind, and spirit are heightened and quickened. A greater endowment of this gift provides literally a new dimension of life. Paul taught that the fruit of the Spirit is “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance . . .” (Galatians 5:22-23).

When we center our lives upon the Father of life and love, we are filled with an endowment of his Spirit--in this way we take upon ourselves his countenance; then, with this Spirit, our hearts are changed. This change of heart becomes obvious to all through our actions and attributes, which mark us as spiritually healthy. Likewise,

the lack of spiritual health is also plainly visible. A comparison of these two conditions follows:

Spiritually well

Love
Peace
Joy
Hope
Faith
Patience
Trust
Goodwill
Light Humor

Spiritually ill

Indifference, hatred
Nervousness, irritability
Sadness, sour nature
Despair
Disbelief, cynicism
Impatience, intolerance
Distrust, suspicion
Animosity
Dark Humor

In a sense, those with decreased power to love are suffering from malnutrition of the spirit. It becomes clear from these lists that the qualities of being spiritually alive contribute essential qualities to good parenting.

The Savior urged us, "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:4-5)

Just as the branch withers and dies without the source of nutrition from the vine, so we wither and become spiritually weakened when we are cut off from the source of life. Paul taught, . . . "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Romans 8:14). In a very real sense, man in and of himself is only half alive; but when linked with this greater power, he becomes full of light, life, and love. These qualities create a heaven within the heart--the first step toward creating a heaven within the home.

Though I converted from being an agnostic to being a Christian at the age of seventeen and accepted the truths of the gospel, the next ten years I lived in frustration as I attempted to live these truths without the power. I was continually discouraged and depressed,

because while I rejoiced in the principles, I could not put them into practice. My difficulties lay not with the more elementary steps of obedience, such as attendance at meetings, studying the word, and (reluctant) fasting; it was the weightier matters of the law--those that are the fruits of a good heart: faith, hope, and charity--that eluded me. In time I became cynical; I felt that the Christian life was out of reach. Even as I looked to others who seemed to be succeeding, I wondered if it was all a pretense. Good hearts, love, and happy family life seemed an impossible dream, and my ineffective efforts to achieve it became a terrible joke. Thus, while I peered into the kingdom, I was still out in the cold, dark, and dreary world of despair.

Then one day, while attending a lecture given by an insightful man, I was taught a new truth that from that day forward changed my heart and my life. His message was simple: We do not have to be good in order to live the gospel of Jesus Christ but, rather, smart enough to seek help; and when we turn our hearts to him in earnest seeking, our very nature can be changed and our dormant heart filled with the love of Christ. He explained that the two challenges of life are, first, to learn the truth, and second, to live it. However, he said, some of us have the mistaken idea that simply because we know doctrinal truths we should automatically be able to live them--who would think that simply knowing the rules of football would produce a star player? Throughout our lives we need more than just the knowledge that it is true.

I have come to recognize that the gospel is not merely a list of things to do; it is the very power by which we become our divine selves. Paul reminded us "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power" (1 Thessalonians 1:5).

Overcoming Destructive Passion - Temper

As we seek to find God, we will discover ourselves--our best selves. Paul taught, "Ye are complete in him."

I must admit that I am prone to live on the wrong half of the spiritual list. There was a time when I was continually beset by

discouragement, pessimism, impatience, a sour nature, and irritability. I countered a child's temper tantrum with a more forceful one of my own. My rebuttal to an impudent remark was one that stung even more, and believing that some people are just moody or born with a temper, I excused myself.

Such temper left unabated can become extremely destructive. Destructive anger, without faith, hope, and charity is not merely an inherited trait; it is not innocent; it is not merely a weakness of character. Destructive anger is a sign of an underlying serious, petrifying spiritual sickness.

Analyze, as a study in Temper . . . what is it made of? Jealousy, anger, pride, uncharity, cruelty, self-righteousness, touchiness, doggedness, sullenness--these are the ingredients of a dark and loveless soul. . . . A man with such a mood could only make Heaven miserable for all the people in it. . . . To enter Heaven a man must take it with him.

You will see then why Temper is significant. It is not in what it is alone, but in what it reveals. . . . It is the intermittent fever that bespeaks unintermittent disease within; the occasional bubble escaping to the surface which betrays some rottenness underneath. . . . Want of patience, a want of kindness, a want of generosity, a want of courtesy, a want of selfishness, all are instantaneously symbolized in one flash of Temper.

Hence it is not enough to deal with the Temper. We must go to the source, and change the inmost nature, and the angry humours will die away of themselves. Souls are made sweet not by taking the acid fluids out, but by putting something in--a great Love, a new Spirit, the Spirit of Christ. Christ, the Spirit of Christ interpenetrating ours, sweetens, purifies, transforms all. This only can eradicate what is wrong, work a chemical change, renovate and regenerate, and rehabilitate the inner man. Will power does not change men. Time does not change men. Christ

does. . . . Some of us have not much time to lose. I cannot help speaking urgently, for myself, for yourselves." (Henry Drummond, *The Greatest Thing in the World*, pp. 34-37)

With this understanding, and through the awesome love of Christ, my life began to be changed--in time, the destructive passion was neutralized. My whole temperament, changed. Heaven entered my heart and I became genuinely happy, good-natured, and filled with goodwill toward men. However, I found that when I began to drift from the source of light and life, my inclination towards a sour disposition returned. Whenever I have applied a spiritual rejuvenation program of fasting, sincere prayer, meditation, and study of the truth, feelings of love, joy for the sweetness of life, tenderness of heart, and gratitude have returned. I have rejoiced over and over that there is recourse for one who is prone to sins of the disposition! The qualities of love are, without a doubt, the most important attributes for parents. Having them, we can hardly err--but, without them, we can hardly do right.

False Religious Practices

Whereas true worship increases life, love, joy, and freedom, false religious practices curtail, inhibit, and suffocate the life and love within. The commandments of God are intended to set us free, and when they are interpreted in a way that stifles the divine inner nature of man, they are being interpreted falsely. The plan is not for us to lead a forced, contrived existence of pretended Christian virtues; rather, that these virtues become second nature--through the spirit; and yet, some may be misled and may turn not to God, but to practices that do not produce the fruits of a loving nature. Throughout history false religious practices have led to suppression of freedom, truth and light. False religious practices have denied men and women of their right to conscience. False religious practices have crazed within hearts the thirst for blood. False religious practices have stripped the believers of their childlike spontaneity for life, saying, "It

is all sin.” Some are prone to abandon wisdom for doctrine, God for the church, personal meditation for meetings, and conscience for collective thinking. Some even use religion as a cloak to hide themselves from life--supposing themselves to be safe, secure, and saved. They hope for a better life in the hereafter because they have not learned how to live here. For them, religion merely pacifies with answers to the hard questions of life, but does not produce the joy that can be obtained.

For them:

. . .the opening up of the possibility of spiritual growth becomes the signal to stop growing. . . . One by one the spiritual faculties droop and die, one by one from lack of exercise the muscles of the soul grows weak and flaccid, one by one the moral activities cease. So from him that hath not, is taken away that which he hath. . . . He who abandons the personal search of truth, under whatever pretext, abandons truth. . . . Any principle which secures food to the individual without the expenditure of work is injurious, and accompanied by degeneration. (*Natural Law in the Spiritual World*, p. 349)

After discovering the magnificent power of the Spirit to change my nature, I looked back to the detour courses I had traveled. It all became clear--why I had been in such turmoil. There were basically five main detour courses away from true Christian living. As I was able to observe them in myself, I realized they were not unique to me, but that others were suffering in the same ways. The discussion of these detour courses is important to highlight because parents who are traveling them will, by at least example, teach their children to do likewise.

Looking to the Law

While law is intended to give liberty, for some it becomes not only the law, but also their Lord. We have all observed, in others, or

ourselves the tendency to look to the law rather than the author of the law for salvation. Some of us fall into sins of the disposition in our overzealous rush to keep the letter of the law. For instance, the prodigal son was guilty of sins of the body, but his brother was guilty of sins of the disposition. In his pride over success in keeping the law, he was unaware that he was guilty of the sins of arrogance, intolerance, and unkindness. He became nasty, resentful, and bitter because of the attention his father was bestowing upon his wayward brother.

The Savior tried to impress upon the scribes and the Pharisees that it was not their letter of the law diligence that he condemned, but their negligence in omitting the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: “these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone” (Matthew 23:23).

Parents, who attempt to govern in their homes merely by the letter of the law, omitting the spirit of love, are likely to err in sins of the disposition. In the scramble for exact obedience it becomes easier to lose sight of the vision--that the law is meant to assist man in his progress, not to bind him; to augment his ability to love, not increase his inclination to criticize.

People do not usually enjoy the company of a pharisaic personality; they might feel uncomfortable, stiff, and insecure. They may be afraid of doing the wrong thing, or saying the wrong words, or thinking the wrong thoughts, feeling certain that, if they do, the Pharisee will be quick to point it out. Pharisees demand exactness and perfection in the law, while they trample upon the sensitivities of the heart. They cast a solemn seriousness over all occasions and consider laughter, cheerfulness, and a sense of humor certain signs that somebody is up to something. They snip and slash verbally at others trying to compel them to measure up to a prescribed model. They seem to have microscopic vision that enables them to detect faults in others that even God himself cannot find. In their presence little children wilt and adults look down. Yet, while they cloak themselves in the clothes of the righteous, their disposition exposes them--they are not the Disciples of Christ, who said, “By this shall all

men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35).

The law was not intended to bind love, but to define it. In other words, it explains the characteristics of one who loves: they would not lie, steal or take advantage of their brother. They would be filled with faith, hope and charity. Therefore, all of the laws are reflections of how we would treat others if we truly had the love of God in our hearts. The Pharisees did not err because they were zealous in obedience, but because they did not look beyond the law to the giver of the law--the God of love.

Those who are on the detour course of law talk about the law, think about the law, and hope that someone will give them more laws so that they will not have to think. They like to see ethics in clear black and white and have a tendency to go around with measuring stick in hand, looking with a squinted eye at those who do not measure up. Like children in the rule stage of development, for them the law supersedes the Lawgiver himself. And, like children, they must mature beyond this stage if they are to survive spiritually. The apostle Paul stated it most succinctly: “For the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life” (2 Corinthians 3:6). Those on the second detour from true Christianity look to the Church rather than to God.

Looking to the Church

Those on this detour course talk church, pride themselves on being totally active in their church, and find suspect those erring individuals who do not center their lives around the church building and organizations. When they bear testimony, they say such things as, “I am so grateful for the church and its programs. I don’t know what I would do without the church. I would be nothing.” Sometimes, they have the us/they neurotic vision, looking with suspicion upon “nonmembers.”

They usually live in areas where their church is strong and fear greatly if their children do not wish to participate in the current church volleyball league or some other youth activity. For them their church acts as a security system, protecting them from the contamination of

the world. Unfortunately, it may also act as a bushel basket, shielding from the world the light that the Lord has commanded them to, “shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Their greatest aspiration for their children is that they stay active in their church. Their greatest fear is that they or their children will somehow fall away from the activities of their Church, and consequently go away from the flock. One friend recently said, “This is describing me. My family wouldn’t let me play with children who weren’t members of our church; and when I had to move to California, I was actually frightened of the people. I couldn’t believe that there were those not of our church, who lived good, clean lives.”

I am ashamed to look back--to see myself ignoring family and friends simply because they were not members of my church; to see myself hiding from school and community activities; to see myself hoping--expecting--that the church would answer all my questions, and cure all my problems. Though I had joined the church to gain a closer relationship with my Lord and Savior, I actually, in time, substituted the church for my Savior.

Looking to the Word

God has commanded his people time and again to search the scriptures. Study of the word is vital to spiritual understanding and growth. However, some students of scripture become so proficient in their ability to quote chapter and verse on any subject that they forget the Being who inspired the word. In all their study they cannot grasp the main theme: to look to the Savior and live. They often testify of the great ideas and principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ (the Word made flesh) but fail to acknowledge the power of the gospel. They pride themselves on their knowledge and find suspect those who have not acquired as broad an understanding of the great precepts of theology. Often they become caught up--not in what has been revealed, but in what has not. They delight in sharing their own secret discoveries of bits of knowledge that are obscure to others. Their testimonies can be very analytical and cold, although heavily

documented and theologically sound. It is true that the Savior told the Jews, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." But then he added, in sorrow, "And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life" (John 5:39-40).

Scriptural knowledge--all knowledge is good and right, but when the Word becomes the center focus, and is used as a weapon to discriminate against others, it becomes a false religious practice. Which practice can lead one not to the Savior, but away from Him, for in the pride of their learning, they have no need of the Lord.

Coming out of the fog, I can look back and realize the numerous pitfalls of my intellectual only testimony. The Savior said that we should be doers of the word and not hearers only. I was so fascinated with the hearing and the talking of the word that I dismissed much of the doing. An air of exclusive snobbery leads me to seek out those of similar mind, and to ignore others. I cared more for the lecture than the lab! In time, I came to realize that our task is not to merely accumulate the tidbits of facts for some supposed final exam, but to gather traits of character so that we may measure up to our divine destinies--to be partakers of the divine nature of Christ.

Then there are those who look around them--at the people--in the hopes of finding their God.

Looking to the People

Those who look to the people of the organization have the tendency to either scorn or to worship them. They look to the people, they talk about the people, they focus on the people. They want to know the details of the lives of their leaders in hopes that they will show them exactly what they should do with their own lives.

For some it becomes a competitive race for the prize--what that prize is, I am not sure. When I was running on the people-detour-course, I felt as if I were in a race--in competition with fellow members of my church. When I thought myself to be in the lead, I felt superior and smug; when I perceived myself as falling behind I became discouraged and depressed. With one eye on those behind and one eye on those ahead, I had no eyes left for the Lord. It was a mental

scuffle for recognition reminiscent of my high school days: who would be voted most likely to succeed? Best looking? Best dressed? Most popular? Best scription--most spiritual--best cook--best mother--best decorator--best fruit canner--best seamstress--most prompt?

With such pride oriented motives comes the natural consequence of criticism towards others. We can hear persecutions around us today, "I knew that that kid was going to have trouble--after all, his parents . . . I just won't do it--that Reverend is in it for the glory . . . Sure, she's good at teaching Sunday School, but when you see her on the street . . . I've heard that she . . ." This type of petty persecution inflicted upon one another can be the most destructive of all. It is, in fact, the antithesis of Christian living: instead of tolerance, there is criticisms; instead of appreciation for differences in style and personality, there is insistence upon conformity; instead of freedom and spontaneity of thought, meaningless safe answers are demanded. Everyone becomes running scared for fear of criticism, and it all adds up to a hellish existence--the type of existence the Savior had to endure with the scribes and Pharisees. It is the literal creation of hell in the making--rooted in jealousy, envy, and pride.

C. S. Lewis described it well when he said,

Be sure, there is something inside you which, unless it is altered, will put it out of God's power to prevent your being eternally miserable. While that something remains there can be no Heaven for you, just as there can be no sweet smells for a man with a cold in the nose, and no music for a man who is deaf. It's not a question of God sending us to Hell. In each of us there is something growing up which will of itself be Hell unless it is nipped in the bud. The matter is serious; let us put ourselves in his hands at once, this very day, this hour. (*A Mind Awake*, pp. 171-72).

Pat Holland has said regarding the inclination to look to one another rather than the Savior,

Obviously the Lord has created us with different personalities, as well as differing degrees of energy, interest, health, talent, and opportunity. So long as we are committed to righteousness and living a life of faithful devotion, we should celebrate these divine differences, knowing they are a gift from God. We must not feel so frightened, so threatened and insecure; we must not need to find exact replicas of ourselves in order to feel validated as women of worth. There are many things over which we can be divided, but one thing is needful for our unity--the empathy and compassion of the living Son of God.

I believe we can find our steady footing and stilling of the soul by turning away from physical preoccupations, superwoman accomplishments, and endless popularity contests, and returning instead to the wholeness of our soul--that unity in our very being that balances the demanding and inevitable diversity of life. (*One Needful Thing*)

The activities of the church enhance social relationships, but the goal of the church is not simply to bring us together but to bring us to Jesus Christ, the Father, and the Holy Ghost. If we lose sight of that supreme goal for each of us, we may become lost in a maze of social interaction that can impede our spiritual growth. We experience healthy, warm, loving relationships not by sidestepping Christ, but by centering our lives on him.

Looking to the Self

I found myself on the fifth detour course when, not realizing the power source available from God, I believed that I had to rely upon myself. I am really not certain what, exactly, I was striving for--I doubt that it was the promised rewards of pearly gates and streets paved of gold on the other side--but still I found myself gritting my teeth and increasing pace so that I would somehow get myself there. When the gospel program is viewed as a survival of the fittest--an idea that

goes hand in hand with that of looking to other people--there is a tendency to go into maximum training to build oneself up for the race. Instead of relying upon the strength of God, we rely upon the arm of flesh, or our mortal abilities, and attempt to work our way to Heaven.

Those who have known this addiction to work out their salvation alone may feel unacceptable unless they are actively engaged in all good causes. Consequently, they are those who must work from sun up to sun down. Guilt-ridden, they are prone to run from this to that, constantly frustrated with their inability to run fast enough or work hard enough. The idea goes like this: physical labor--work--is good; more work is better; and a life of total work is saintly indeed. They pride themselves on their ability to do a lot with a little time. They are obsessed with time management, goals, efficiency, and programs to increase output. They look like the rabbit in *Alice in Wonderland* who, with clock in hand, kept running and shouting, "I'm late--I'm late, for a very important date. No time to say hello, good-bye; I'm late, I'm late, I'm late."

I met a woman who helped me to see through the maze of overwork. She said,

I used to overwork. I would get nervous with all that I had to do. I found myself becoming crabby and short-tempered. While hurrying through one task, I mentally tortured myself for being unable to do the next. I couldn't sit down to think, read the scriptures, or pray. I would jump up with feelings of guilt; I actually felt like I was wasting my time. Gradually, I came to realize what I was doing. I was sacrificing inner peace for an outward appearance of being a good mother. I won't do it anymore. The most rewarding work--if we want to call it that--comes when we labor for the spirit, labor in study, or labor in service to loved ones. I had been, in fact, running from the real joys of living.

I agreed, when I was in this race, I observed that I was not alone. There were lots of us rushing about--perhaps believing that busyness is a sign of importance, that the best life is the fast life, or that the

complexities of life can be blotted out by the blurred vision of a fleeting glance. Whatever the reason, rushing about without clear direction achieves little except rushing about. For all the activity at the Mad Tea Party, Alice never did get a drink of tea; she left unfilled. If we expend our energies in nonsensical scampering about, we, too, will leave and live exasperated and unfulfilled.

Constant, bustling activity may not appear much like sloth, but it can be just as damaging to us spiritually if it keeps us from acknowledging the Lord and drawing upon his strength. “Be still, and know that I am God,” he bid the ancients (Psalm 46:10). Even the Savior did not run faster than he had strength; he spent long hours in quiet communication with his Father. He realized that unless he received a renewal of strength from the Father, he would have nothing to share. We, too, must order our lives so that the best is not sacrificed for the good. There is much good that we can do with our time; but if in the pursuit of good we ignore the best and the most important, the good becomes the enemy to the best.

One last word, all of these courses are a part of the program of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and present danger only when they substitute for the gospel itself--to bring us to the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. They ought to be pointers to Christ, not away from him. When parents are caught up on a detour course, it is only natural that they will take their children with them. Parents who are focused only on the law will lead to bondage; parents who are focused only on the word, will lead to the lecture without the lab; parents who are focused only on looking to the people will lead their children to depend on the arm of the flesh rather than God; parents who only focus upon activity in the Church building, might impress upon their children that the Church is the substitute for the Christ.

Summary

The importance of the principle of divine spiritual aid cannot be overstated; it is vital to good parenting. We cannot love others without the Spirit in our lives, and we cannot enjoy the Spirit in abundance without looking to the God of love.

When we have the love of God in our hearts we can hardly do wrong; without it we will hardly be able to do right. Families are held together by love, not by mandate; and the quality of love must be unlimited. When our own runs in short supply, our Father is there to lend to us from his own infinite abundance. If we keep our eyes on him, we cannot fail in our calling as his stewards.

We must capture the vision of Heaven that can be created by those who are alive with the spirit of love, warmth, and goodwill, if we are ever to attain it in our own lives. In the presence of such beings we are likely to become our real selves--our best selves. We are motivated to do better, to be better--not because of their authority, but simply because of their faith, warmth, and personality. Through their eyes of faith and trust we are renewed in confidence. We know that if we err, they will be understanding--but not permissive. They clearly realize that, just as fragrant roses come from compliance to the laws of gardening, so joy and peace follow obedience to divine laws. They would radiate fun, excitement, and adventure, for their love of life communicates itself to those around them.

The source from which these Christ like people draw their spiritual power is available to us all. He is there to assist us in obtaining Heaven here and hereafter, with hearts filled with life, light, and abundant love. The key is to turn our hearts to him and candidly ask for his help.

Principle in Action

On the general level, as one who continually struggles with flabby spirituality, I offer my personal testimony that applying a program of spiritual rejuvenation works. Shakespeare seems to describe the weakened condition when he wrote in the play Hamlet, "How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable seem. . . all the uses of this world!" At such times I have applied my personal program of rejuvenation: reading the scriptures or other uplifting literature,

listening to good music, walking through a beautiful field of flowers, enjoying a quiet talk with a friend who radiates light. Over and over, it has worked. My soul, once again renewed, brightens with greater light, life, and love. It truly does work!

The sheer transforming power of the Spirit was again impressed upon me when for several months I taught a theology class at the Vacaville Medical Facility, a minimum-security prison. There I met a man who was called, simply, Stephenson by his fellow inmates. He was in his fifties and had brown hair and a deeply lined face. He was usually quiet and withdrawn during our discussions, but one day after the meeting he said,

There was a time when I hated all people. I couldn't stand to have someone brush up against me in the prison yard. I literally detested everyone.

When I began to come to these meetings, I thought they were a joke. I guess I didn't want to believe that I was a child of God because then I knew I would have to change. For some reason, though, I kept coming. I even started doing some of the things that you told us to do. I started praying and reading the Bible and other inspirational books.

Gradually, it all started to make sense; especially since I was changing. I never thought that I could change--I never even wanted to change. But something was happening. The thing that has been really different is that I have begun to love people. The guys in this group mean everything to me--it's like we're brothers. I can't tell you what this means to me; I've never loved anyone!

I don't know if there's a God, and I certainly don't know if I am a son of God, but I do know this: it's working.

His mouth began to quiver and tears came to his eyes as he spoke, but he was not ashamed. Stephenson had been what we call a hardened criminal--one whose heart had been unfeeling and empty of love--but through simple spiritual exercises he was reawakening into life, light, and love.