

Spiritually

Our love for ourselves and our love for the world are, by creation, heavenly loves. They are loves of the natural part of us, which serves spiritual loves as a foundation serves a house. *Divine Love and Wisdom 396*

The Lord created us and loves us, so it is important that we accept and love ourselves too. The more we love ourselves as 'a child of God', the more love we have to offer others. Hildegard of Bingen, a Christian mystic, talks about us being 'co-creators with God in making a better world'. What a beautiful thought to rejoice in. This may help us to give thanks to the Lord for who we are, in all our angelic potential. Loving our angelic selves is so important that the whole of next month's session will be devoted to this.

Going within

It is really beneficial to body, mind and spirit to give ourselves some quiet time alone every day to connect with the Lord's love and wisdom. You will know what works best for you. It may be when you are out walking the dog, or reading and meditating on a few verses from the Word before you get going in the morning; anything that allows the Lord to come close.

Prayer

Dear Lord

Thank you for my body which allows me to see the beauty around me, to hear and speak your truth, to touch and be touched with love and to be of service with you in creating a better world.

Thank you for my thoughts and feelings which help me to understand and feel what is real and true in my life.

Thank you for my spirit, my direct connection with you, where I experience heavenly joy, compassion and peace. Keep my heart and mind open to your love in all that I think, say and do.

Five Essentials - Aspects of Loving - a focus for the Church
4th Essential: Part 2: Loving ourselves - caring for ourselves
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Loving ourselves - caring for ourselves

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself.
Matthew 22:37-39

Beryl is a stalwart of her local church and well known by her neighbours as someone who is always busy caring for others. She has her own family commitments and she is the church secretary and on all the church rotas. She is an important part of the pastoral team and visits the sick and elderly several times a week. At the end of each day Beryl collapses into bed exhausted and finds that her mind is so busy with all she must do that she cannot fall asleep.

Do you recognise Beryl? Our faith exhorts us to serve others and we valiantly push ourselves to keep giving of our time and effort. Our Lord tells us to love our neighbour as our self. What does this mean to you? It is possible to serve others at the expense of our own needs so that our body and inner spirit becomes depleted. How do we know when we have the balance right? Sometimes it is helpful to stop and reflect upon our motivations for what we are doing; are these heavenly ones, bringing us closer to the Lord? Another approach is to ask ourselves how we feel about what we do? If we are doing something from a willing heart and a wise mind then we will take delight in it because our spirit, mind and body are all aligned and at one. So how do we care for ourselves physically, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually?

Body

With those in whom celestial and spiritual love reigns, good from the Lord flows in by way of the soul into the body, as a consequence of which the body becomes full of light.

Arcana Caelestia 2973:5

The Lord's life flows into our soul and if we are open to his love and wisdom, it flows into our physical body. This enables us to serve others in so many wonderful ways. How easy it is for us to take our bodies for granted though. Often it is only when we get ill or age starts to take its toll that we appreciate just what an amazing body we have been gifted with. We can show our gratitude and recognition of our body as this vital gift from the Lord by eating healthily, resting and exercising it appropriately.

Our body is not a separate entity but closely connected to our thoughts, feelings and spirit. If we learn to pay attention to it, then it can become a teacher of our deeper psychological states within, which may be calling out for our attention. For example, when we are tense and stressed this will often transfer itself to stiff shoulder and neck muscles. Our physical body may be signalling to us that inner reflection and healing needs to take place. For some, activities such as circle dancing, yoga, Tai Chi etc. help to rebalance us and connect body, mind and spirit. Others may prefer more traditional physical activities such as gardening, walking in the countryside, being creative with our hands or just allowing our bodies to soak up the sunshine and feeling the Lord's loving life energising all the cells of our body. And of course, any form of physical activity done in service and from a loving intention is connecting and enlivening as the quote from AC2973:5 above so beautifully describes.



Psychologically

We need to provide food and clothing for our bodies. This is a first and primary goal. But we do this so that we may have sound minds in sound bodies. We need to provide food for the mind as well, such things as relate to intelligence and wisdom, so that our minds may be in a state to serve God. If we do these things, we provide for our own good to eternity. We must provide for ourselves, yet not for ourselves. AC 6936-7

We are told again and again in the Word how much the Lord loves us. How easy is it for you to tell yourself you are loveable? We may have been brought up to think that this will make us proud, or self-centred or

that it goes against the church's teaching about our hereditary evils. We are loveable, we have been created to be a channel for the Lord's love to eternity and when we are able to recognise this angelic self and love it for the goodness it brings to the world, then we are better able to love others. It may be that some of our ideas and judgements about ourselves are now ready to be replaced by a more accepting approach to who we are, a mix of human weaknesses and Divinely inspired goodness and truth. It can be a real challenge to accept the whole of ourselves with love but who are we not to when the Lord does?



Our mind also needs to rest. If we allow it, our brain never switches off, we have a constant 'cocktail party chatter' going on inside our head which is tiring and does not allow the Lord to speak to us. Contemplative prayer and meditation are spiritual practices which enable our minds to be quiet so that we can hear the Lord's voice. What other activities help your mind to relax? Swedenborg describes how angels in heaven have relaxation time, to enjoy in a delightful way their heavenly companions, to laugh and to relax from their 'work'. How much more do we need this in our human state?

Emotionally

We know that the repression of strong emotions like anger can lead to illness such as depression. Our emotions can sweep us up in feelings of anger, loathing, loneliness or on the contrary, feelings of deep joy, excitement and thankfulness. Sometimes the power of our emotions is frightening to us and we try to repress these feelings in the hopes that they will go away. Rather than always being swept up by our feelings or repressing them, we can learn to get in touch with them by observing them in a more detached way. This can be the start of caring for our emotional self. By acknowledging our feelings in a non-judgmental way, recognising the source of them as either the hells latching on to our ego's sense of separateness or from our connection to the Lord and the heavens, then we are in a healthier place to acknowledge in true humility, the Lord working in our lives. We are able to let go and allow the Lord to heal us of emotional pain.