

**For The Sake of Others**  
*(The Nature of Spiritual Formation)*

Rev. David G. Bostick  
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**Introduction:**

*Spiritual Formation*

"Spiritual formation is a process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others." (3)

People are interested in spiritual formation because it fills a void in their life. That void is a longing for God that is not always recognized as such.

That is why mankind seeks fulfillment in life in so many different ways. Many have discovered that true fulfillment in life flows out of our spiritual life.

Too many of the things we seek in this world for fulfillment are transient. However, a spiritual life can bring lasting fulfillment.

In his first epistle, chapter 3, the Apostle John says that the essence of a spiritual life is love for others. He describes those who have spiritual life as, "children of God".

**1 John 3:1 (NASB)**

[1] See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are.

In the next section of this epistle, verses 4-9, John deals with understanding sin.

**1 John 3:4 (NASB)**

[4] Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.

John states that sin is lawlessness, and he contrasts it with righteousness.

John did not stop with just a description to help us understand what sin is, he went on to talk about sin's remedy.

**1 John 3:8b-9 (NASB)**

[8] ... The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.

[9] No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

In the incarnation, Christ destroys the work of the devil by the new birth; we must be born of God.

Then John talks about the backbone of new birth -- love. The new birth is becoming part of something greater than self. The new birth is described in many ways.

- Being born into the Kingdom of God
- Being born into the family of God
- Becoming part of the Body of Christ
- Being grafted into the main branch
- Becoming a follower of Christ

Notice that these are not singular events.

**1 John 3:10 (NASB)**

[10] By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.

In the rest of the chapter, John talks about the reality or practice of love.

### 1 John 3:17 (NASB)

[17] But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?

The backbone of the spiritual life of a follower of Christ is love expressed in meeting the needs of others.

We have talked about the expectations Christ has for His followers as recorded in **(Matthew 25:31-46)**.

- Feeding the hungry
- Water for the thirsty
- Hospitality toward the stranger
- Clothes for the naked
- Visiting those who are sick or in prison

### Matthew 25:44-45 (NASB)

[44] "Then they themselves also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?'

[45] "Then He will answer them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'

### Illustration: Taylor's Closet

It is important to understand that our spiritual life is not just between self and God, others must be included. There are three elements to the spiritual life.



## I. Understanding Love

So, if love is the backbone of our spiritual life, then we need to understand what love is. Paul does a good job of this in his first letter to the church at Corinth.

### 1 Corinthians 13:13 (NASB)

[13] But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

We don't have time to go through Paul's whole chapter on love but a simple outline will help us to get the details fixed in our minds.

In verses 1-3, Paul talks about the results of the absence of love in the lives of people:

- Hypocrisy
- Worthlessness
- Emptiness

In verses 4-7, Paul talks about the essence of love:

- Patience
- Kindness
- Not jealous
- No bragging
- No arrogance
- Not unbecoming
- Not self seeking
- Does not keep score
- Avoids unrighteousness
- Rejoices in truth
- Bears all things
- Believes all things
- Hopes
- Endures

In verses 8-13, Paul explains the superiority of love. In verse thirteen Paul uses the word **abide**.

### 1 Corinthians 13:13 (NASB)

[13] But now faith, hope, love, **abide** these three; but the greatest of these is love.

The Greek word for **abide** used here is 'meno'. "Used in an absolute sense, with the idea of perpetuity, i.e., to remain or endure forever, to be perpetual." (CWS-NT, g3306)

Unlike friendships that can grow cold with distance or strain, love endures forever; it is perpetual. That's the backbone of the spiritual life.

So our diagram showing the three elements of our spiritual life would be overshadowed with LOVE.



### Illustration: Picture of soldier in Iraq:

This soldier in Iraq gives us a beautiful picture of love. This picture is not a political statement about the good things that are happening because of the war in Iraq, although it certainly does that in a powerful way.

This picture, beyond all the circumstances that surround it, is a picture of the love a soldier expressed

toward a little child. What a contrast; an innocent little child in the arms of a combat ready soldier.

When you zoom in on the picture, the soldier has a sad look on his face; he looks close to tears to me. What a powerful picture of love.

## II. The Application of Love

Understanding that love is the backbone and overshadows the three elements of our spiritual life, we need to go on to understand what the application of love looks like.

God made the application of love very clear to the children of Israel during the time He was using Moses to give them the law.

### Leviticus 19:18 (NASB)

[18] 'You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.

Take time this week to read this verse in it's context, especially verses 9-18.

In **Matthew 5:44**, Jesus tells His followers that they are to love their enemies. It is important to look at this command in it's context of verses 38-48.

In **Matthew 19:19**, Jesus told the Rich Young Ruler he was to love his neighbor as himself.

In **Matthew 23:39**, Jesus tells a Pharisee that the second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. Let's look at it.

### **Matthew 22:34-40 (NASB)**

[34] But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. [35] One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him,

[36] “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?”

[37] And He said to him, “ ‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’

[38] “This is the great and foremost commandment.

[39] “The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’

[40] “On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

Without this love for God and neighbor, the law is worthless. In fact, Paul talks about that in his letter to the church at Rome. **Romans 13:8-10**.

Love is the fulfillment of the law. Not just memorizing, knowing and understanding the law, but practicing the law in the actions of our daily lives.

Everything points to the fact that in **Matthew 25**, Jesus ties our actions of love for others to the standard by which we will be judged.

Love is more than a word we toss around. Love is more than a momentary emotion or feeling we experience. Love is a lifestyle that flows out of our relationship with God and is evident in the actions of our daily lives.

### **III. An Example of Love**

The examples of love that we could look at in the Bible are overwhelming. I think the parable of the Good Samaritan is one of the best examples we have for our discussion of spiritual formation.

The heart of conforming to the image of Christ for the sake of others is love expressed in the actions of our daily lives.

#### *The Good Samaritan*

### **Luke 10:30-37 (NASB)**

[30] Jesus replied and said, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead.

[31] “And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

[32] “Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

[33] “But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion,

[34] and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him.

[35] “On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.’

[36] “Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers’ hands? ”

[37] And he said, “The one who showed mercy toward him.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do the same.”

A lot could be made of the characters Jesus uses in this parable.

There were those agents of the devil, the **robbers**.

There was the **innkeeper** who must have wondered who this man was that used his time and resources to take care of a stranger.

Can you imagine how his observations, of this act of love, might have affected his life? When the Samaritan lived out the love of God in caring for this stranger, he was being a witness to the love and **supply** of God.

The **priest** was a man of God, appointed by the authority of Mosaic Law. His job was to serve at God's altar. From the parable, we learn that Jesus did not think that all men of God were holy men. In Jesus' story, this man represented the leadership of God's church.

The **Levite** was also appointed by Mosaic Law. His job was to be a servant of the priest, doing the menial tasks at the temple. We could say that he represented any servant of God.

There was the **Samaritan** also. He was the only one to stop and help the poor victim. The Jews held the Samaritans with great reproach and contempt. I'm sure the reverse was also true most of the time.

The Samaritan is the expression of love in Jesus' story. We do not need to know whether he ever claimed to love strangers or not. It is not necessary

because the actions of his life show us that he did.

Then there was the **victim** in the story. I had never noticed this before but, Jesus never said whether the victim was a Samaritan, a Jew, or any other kind of person.

I think the reason He never mentions it, is because it's not important. There are all kinds of people, from every walk of life, that have needs that God is anxious to meet. And God meets those needs through His children.

This parable has one more important fact, which we see from the context that Luke places it in. The parable of the Good Samaritan was told to answer a question.

#### **Luke 10:25-29 (NASB)**

[25] And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

[26] And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?"

[27] And he answered, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."

[28] And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE."

[29] But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Then Jesus tells him the story of the good Samaritan to answer his question.

Who is my neighbor?

It's the masses of people who have not heard the gospel message because resources to reach them are limited.  
(Give to missions)

My neighbors are the family in the neighborhood across from the church that needs their yard cleaned up.  
(Join or form a group)

My neighbors are the millions of children around the world who are abused and starving.  
(Sponsor a child)

My neighbor is the homeless guy you see on the street corner begging for money.  
(Support the Salvation Army, the Gospel Rescue Mission or Teen Challenge)

My neighbors are those who have no clean water to drink.  
(Give to drill a well in a remote village in Africa or some other part of the world)

My neighbor is the guy trying to push his stranded car out of the middle of the intersection.  
(Turn your flashers on, get out, and help)

The list of the needs that are out there, that God is anxious to use us to meet, is endless.

Who is my neighbor?

**Illustration: Four Feathers - "God put you in my way."**

### Resources:

1. NASB - New American Standard Bible (NASB). Cedar Rapids: Laridian, 2002.

2. CWS-NT - AMG Complete Word Study Dictionary - New Testament (CWS\_NT). Cedar Rapids: Laridian Electronic Publishing, 2007.
3. Mulholland, M. Robert Jr., Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation, Downers Grove, Illinois, InterVarsity Press, 1993.

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