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S5. Spiritual Foundation Series

E11. Practical Advice to Young Believers

Oftentimes a new believer is only focused on one thing, and that is their relationship with Jesus Christ. Their hearts have been apprehended, and they are exuberant about wanting to talk about Him and to come to know Him in greater measure. But at the same time they find themselves with the Bible in one hand, and as a member of a church in the other hand, and they really don't know how to properly relate to either. Following are five useful tips for a young believer...as well as to the not-so-young believer.

1. Read the Bible, and read it as the word of God.

1 Pet. 2.2 “as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.”

Bible reading is as essential to our spiritual well-being as food is to our natural bodies. Never underestimate its importance, becoming undernourished. Approach Bible reading only partially in an attempt to know and memorize the word, but most importantly receive it as though God is speaking to you, One on one, as emphasized in 1 Thes. 2.13,

"For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe."

That word "received," as in "received the word," is very important in our Christian walk. One does not just "believe" in Jesus as Savior but must also "receive" His Spirit into our hearts; so too with the word of God, as it enters our minds, it should simultaneously be received into our hearts. This word "receive" in the original Greek means, to "aggressively take" _to take (receive) by showing a strong personal initiative. There is nothing casual or normal about things of the Spirit; they require focus, the exercise of our faith, and zealous pursuit _like one being hungry desperately searching the kitchen for something to eat.

Notice also the closing clause, "which also effectively works in you who believe." Allow this to happen, no, rather, anticipate this to happen; that meditating on the word of God will begin to be written on your heart and will effectively work in you to do those things pleasing to God. (Mt. 13.23) A parrot can cite the word, but, unlike the believer, it cannot become the word.

Do not try to read the entire Bible through in a year, from Genesis to Revelation. You will be quickly overwhelmed and bogged down with historical details and factual data outside your current need for spiritual growth. Be selective. The **Old** Testament is focused on Israel, and is 75% of the Bible spanning over 1600 years. The **New** Testament is focused on Christ and the Church and spans some 65 years. You will have time in your life to return to Old Covenant reading, and it is good because the whole of it is prophetic of Christ, and you will be able to make connections between the physical Old Testament and the spiritual New Testament. But for now, realize that we believers are under a New Covenant in Christ, taking heed Heb. 8.13 "In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away."

I would recommend begin reading with the Gospels of Mathew, Mark and Luke to get a broad picture of the life of Christ from His birth to His resurrection and ascension into heaven; to become acquainted with His teachings (such as the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5); and His personal words to His disciples (such as at the last supper (Lk. 22.14-38); and of His promises (such as to build His Church (Mt. 16.16-18); and to learn of how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament Jewish prophecies of the coming Messiah. (Lk. 24.44)

Then move on and settle into the Gospel of John who will challenge your thinking and lay open the spiritual world of **relationships**; relationships between Jesus and the Father, between Jesus and yourself, and between you and the Father (Jn. 17.21); and the role of the Holy Spirit in making it all possible (Jn. 6.63). John's Gospel differs significantly from the other three "Synoptic" (general summary) Gospels touching more on life and spiritual realities. He emphasizes Jesus' identity as the Word of God incarnate (made flesh) (Jn. 1.14); of Him being wholly the Son of God and the Son of Man (Jn. 20.21, 3.13); of Christ being the "Bread of Life" (Jn. 6.35 ff); of Christ being the resurrection and the life (Jn. 11.25); and of Christ

actually dwelling in the believer and of the believer dwelling in Christ (Jn. 15.5). These are all awesome and significant spiritual truths to be unveiled and received. John's writings, including his three epistles, as a whole, touch more deeply into spiritual matters and require patience and prayerful meditation but give a solid spiritual foundation for one's life.

With the Gospels as a foundation, now move into Acts and the epistles of Paul, James, Peter, John and Jude. These letters give instruction, encouragement and guidance to our daily Christian walk. They address specific doctrine and provide a deeper understanding of the Gospel and what it means for believers. The Book of Revelation is very challenging with much symbolism and with ties to Old Testament books, e.g., Daniel. This book requires much maturity, revelation, and the aid of "true" teachers.

Personally, I use the New King James translation for most quotes in writing because it is a rather accurate translation and because it is still close to the King James Version very much in use in many churches. However, for overall accuracy in translation I find the New American Standard Version extremely good.

2. Fellowship. To be a part of a church and share in its activities and services is good, however, this alone is inadequate. Being able to gather together and worship and to hear a sermon is always good and uplifting, but it lacks something needful for young and older believers alike. It is necessary to gather together in smaller groups, enclaves, with mature believers for personal interaction and instruction. Note how the word "*fellowship*" is used in 1 Jn. 1.3,

"3We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And this fellowship of ours is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ."

True fellowship means to have communion or interaction with another. Here John directs this interaction in two ways, with one another, and with God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ. Although in the larger church services one may sense a fellowship with God; it is in these smaller groups that fellowship with one another is heightened and we are able to feed off one another more directly. It is within this smaller *enclave that one can ask questions and ask for prayer regarding personal issues that cannot be asked in the larger meetings. (*The word "enclave" as used here simply refers to a small group that is somewhat different from the larger Church that surrounds it.)

It is here where questions may be asked about doctrines or teachings to help clarify misunderstandings, about church practices regarding worship, rituals, question of moral conduct, and how to deal with personal and family issues. It is a place where hidden matters of the heart are dealt with, not by personal feelings, but spiritually with the word of God and discernment. It is written in Heb. 5.14, that the more spiritually mature can add a measure of this "*discernment*,"

*"14But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to **discern** both good and evil."*

This means that the more mature ones in our little enclave are better able to distinguish the finer aspects of things and to have a "better sensing" of "*good and evil*"— meaning

distinguishing good doctrine and teaching from bad doctrine and false teaching, true prophecy from false prophecy, good moral conduct from bad conduct, good social interactions and activities from bad, as well as the good or bad in family matters. This is the setting where foundations are laid and the putting on of the new man begins.

This is also the setting for more specific prayer, prayer for specific needs or situations. It may also be a setting for the functioning of the gifts of the Spirit as the Spirit may lead. Care must be taken here that true maturity is present, especially as an elder, to give oversight because the exercise of the gifts of the Holy Spirit needs careful supervision.

3. Worship. Resist the two most common urges during worship that marks the immature—regardless of age: the loss of focus and the loss of direction. The first, the loss of focus is caused by the undisciplined wondering mind. Jesus criticized the Pharisees, Mt. 15.8 “*These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.*”

The Focus: In the Divine Presence. Our minds must be locked into two spiritual facts: The first is that we are in the presence of God, Father and Son:

Mt. 18.20 “*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*”

Eph. 2.6 “*God raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,*”

Col. 3.1-2 “*1If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.*”

Realization of this alone should be cause for focusing our attention—we have entered the divine presence of God. Physically we are in one place, spiritually we are in another. It is like the ladder seen in Jacob’s dream in which the bottom was on the earth and the top reached to heaven, and the Lord was standing at the top. (Gn. 28.11-13.) Physically our feet are on the earth, but spiritually we have reached into the heaven. It is a solemn time, a time to honor and give thanks to God in all humility and brokenness.

Secondly, as songs of worship flood the throne of God, we must pay attention to every word being voiced, as if the thought is originating from our own hearts. Take for example the song *Agnus Dei*, meaning the Lamb of God:

[Verse]

Alleluia, Alleluia
For the Lord God Almighty reigns
Alleluia, Alleluia
For the Lord God Almighty reigns
Alleluia

[Chorus]

Holy, Holy Are You
Lord God, Almighty
Worthy is the Lamb, worthy is the Lamb
You are Holy, Holy Are You
Lord God, Almighty
Worthy is the Lamb, worthy is the Lamb
Amen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KVFzxazTQNM&list=PLiFVIB92ouhaq3Dgwd3DNeVqLUpmECTH6&index=1>

This song cannot be sung as from rote memory as the mind searches for other things to think about. Our focus is on the presence of the Lord and every word expressing His greatness and holiness. We are standing before our Lord and God speaking directly to Him with the aid of songs and prayers that help focus our attention.

Direction of worship. Consider Israel as they wondered in the wilderness. At the center of their encampment was the Tabernacle of God, the place of worship. The first part of the Tabernacle, known as the Outer Court, was the place of sacrifice, having the *altar* which speaks prophetically of the cross of Christ. The tent proper was divided into two sections separated by veils. The first, the Holy Place contained the *Lampstand* and the *Table of Shewbread*; both of which speak of Jesus Christ as the *Light of the World* and the *Bread of Life*. But then, within the second veil, known as the Most Holy Place, contained the mercy seat on top of the Ark of the Covenant, prophetically speaking of the heavenly throne of God and His presence. This is the place of ultimate worship, before the throne of God where the blood of Christ was placed on the mercy seat and the mercy of God is poured forth.

THIS is the place of worship, the place where all worship is directed towards God the Father and Lord Jesus Christ. Note, in the following passage of Heb. 12.22-24, verse 22 begins with the fact that we “have come” to the throne of God, and not “will come” or in “like manner,” but stressing the fact that we are presently before the throne:

22“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, 23to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

Here, in His presence, our praise is directed directly to God the Father and Lord Jesus Christ. Here, we do not sing “about” Him or “of” Him, but “to” Him. Once in India I was speaking to a worship leader about this. He wasn’t quite understanding it until I gave him the example of the song, “He is Lord,” the lyric, “*He is Lord, He is Lord, He has risen from the dead and He is Lord, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.*” We are not bound to tradition to sing the original lyrics, but to worship God in truth, as we are actually before His presence, and may therefore sing, “**You** are Lord, **You** are Lord, **You** have risen from the dead and **You** are Lord, **every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.**”

It is outside the realm of all good reasoning to be before someone and speak to him as “he,” and not say “you.” So too with true worship before the throne of God, let us speak directly to God the Father and Son. It was with this explanation the eyes of the worship leader I was speaking to suddenly got large and with a bright expression on his face said, “Ah, now I understand.” Then he went on to give other examples of altering songs to meet spiritual reality.

In addition, worship before the throne is directed directly to God and Him alone, and not for songs directed towards the believer, For instance there are “*songs of the camp*,” songs that are not directed Godward but to other believers, such as the song, “*Come and let us go up to the house of the Lord, He will teach us of His ways...*” This is not a worship song but actually a call to worship... “*Come and let us go...*”

Further examples are “*songs of petition*” which better fit prayer meetings than times of worship. These songs address God but are focused on the believer. For example, the song, “*Have Thine own way Lord, have Thine own way, Thou art the potter I am the clay, mold me and make me after Thy will, while I am waiting yielded and still.*” The emphasis here is clearly on you. Similarly is the song, “*Open my eyes Lord, I want to see Jesus,...*”

Within the tabernacle itself the function and type of service varied; for example in the Outer Court the sacrifice was offered on the altar of burnt offerings; in the Holy Place service centered on the lampstand, table of showbread, and incense altar; while within the Most Holy Place was the place where the blood of the sacrifice was applied to the mercy seat as an atonement for sins. If the type of service varied within the tabernacle should not the nature of worship also vary within the heavenly tabernacle made without hands? (Heb. 8.1-2) It is not unreasonable for songs in the camp to be different than the songs of petition in the prayer room, and the songs of worship before the throne of God be separate as well. The principle here is that everything be in its rightful place.

4. Distinguishing Spirit and Emotions

“In the context of human experience, “spirit” and “emotions” are distinct yet interconnected. Emotions are fleeting feelings like happiness or sadness, while “spirit” often refers to a deeper, more enduring aspect of one’s being, connected to a sense of purpose, values, and connection to something larger than oneself. While emotions can be powerful and impactful, they are seen as separate from the more stable and guiding force of the spirit.”

All too often believers, especially young believers, have difficulty distinguishing between their *spirit* and their *emotions*; both are inward, invisible, and come as a feeling or sensing. If we are not careful, we can wrongfully be led by our emotions which are a product of our soul, whereas our spirit is that part of our nature that connects with and is led by, the Holy Spirit—Rm. 8.14 “14For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

Emotions are temporary, subjective feelings that arise in response to external events or internal thoughts and can influence our behavior and decision making. They are often intense and usually short-lived. Positive emotions are feelings of happiness, joy, love, excitement and contentment; whereas negative emotions are sadness, anger, fear, anxiety and grief. These often lead to an immediate reaction and hasty decision. Of particular significance is that emotions can trigger a bodily response such as changes in heart rate, breathing, or body temperature which may alert us as an indicator to do something.

What is of particular concern, leading to deception, is thinking something is spiritual when in reality an emotion triggers the brain to release what are termed *endorphins* to the body; these are “natural pain relievers” and “mood boosters;” where one really feels good about doing something. This can be brought on by activities such as “exuberant” or energetic singing, dancing or bouncing, or laughter. Giving into such emotions is the soul’s way of usurping the role of the spirit. Because it is natural it is easy to give into it.

The way of the **spirit** is more subtle and profound, meaning it may not be immediately obvious but has a deep and significant impact. Things of the spirit are persistent or longer lasting. Being led of the spirit brings with it a sense of morality and a perception of purpose and meaning to life as one becomes connected to the One larger than self—Jesus Christ. It is in the spirit where we become one with His values, purpose, and sense of peace and joy. (Jn. 14.27, 15.11)

And so, emotions, like peace and joy, are fleeting while in spirit are a more enduring component of life. Emotions are usually impulsive, focused on the present moment and immediate reactions, whereby spirit is connected to a broader and higher awareness of action, meaning and purpose. Emotions can strike suddenly, powerfully, even overwhelmingly and controlling, whereas spirit gives a broader sense of stability and guidance, and eternal purpose.

Check in the Spirit. Sometimes we receive a “check in the spirit,” which is an internal alarm causing us to give caution before acting upon an impulse or making a decision. It can be a feeling leery about a teaching, a statement made, a prophecy, the nature of worship or songs, or something portrayed as being spiritual but is being sensed emotional or fleshly. It might be a feeling that we should lead out in a song, a sharing, prophecy, or word of encouragement. We don’t have any reason in the natural to feel this way but an intuition that something is just not right. It is time to pause, not to proceed or to fully act upon it, but to give it time in prayer and thought, and perhaps discussion with others.

5. Religion verses Life. Flee religion and run towards life. As religion controls behavior in a regimented, even legalistic, way imposed from the outside, life springs up spontaneously from within, like the fluid essence from a vine entering its branch. (Jn. 15.5) Religion, like the Law of the Old Covenant, is composed of 613 commandments, with many rituals, sacrifices, holydays, and a prescribed system of worship; whereas life is spiritual, beginning with the divine seed (1 Pet. 1.23) which grows and matures, having inherently within itself the nature and expression of Christ, 2 Pet. 1.2-4,

*2"Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, 3as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to **life** and **godliness**, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, 4by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be **partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."*

In religion man’s primary part is to learn obedience and conformity to its commandments, ordinance, and practices, doing things how and when it is required (Ex.19.5); typified by the Old Covenant and the Law. In the pursuit of life under the New Covenant, man’s primary part begins with **believing** in Jesus Christ as Savior, thereby receiving God’s gift of grace and forgiveness, and by **receiving** God’s gift of His Holy Spirit into his heart. (Acts 2.38) This leads to a transformed life (2 Cor. 3.18), led by the Spirit of Christ, enabling the believer to live righteously and to have a part in our Lord’s work of building up His Church, the Body of Christ in the earth. Guard this truth, less it slip by and one becomes entangled again with legalism, duties, offices, and fleshly services. Whereby we must heed the warning of Paul, Gal. 3.1-5,

"1O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? 2This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? 3Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? 4Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain. 5He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"

I pray learning to walk by these five exhortations will enhance your spiritual life, bring growth and maturity, bring a goodly measure of stability and direction to your Kingdom walk, and above all enhance your relationship with God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ and with others to whom God has joined you.

S5.E11. Questions for Discussion

1. Explain the importance of 1 Thes. 2.13 for the young believer.
2. How is then Gospel of John different from the Synoptic Gospel of Matthew, Mark and Luke?
3. How is “fellowship” different in a small group (enclave) then the church?
4. How is “discernment a sign of maturity?
5. How might one keep a greater focus during worship?
6. How are songs of “worship” different from others songs, such as songs of petition?
7. Distinguish between “emotions” and “spirit”. What are the key differences?
8. Explain the statement, “Flee religion and run towards life.”