

17) Humanity, Part 5

In part 1 of our theological topic: Humanity, we focussed on our created essence as humans to love as we are loved. In part 2 we focussed on the reality of how things go wrong in our world and in our lives. The traditional/biblical word for this is sin. In Part 3 we began to focus more specifically on the Christian life with God above, beside and within us powering us for living love in all its dimensions despite the challenges and struggles. We dug into the meaning of Grace and the movement of the Holy Spirit. We also reflected on some important qualities of the Spirit-filled life such as gratitude, humility, generosity, the importance of faith and hope to support love, and finally, peace. In part 4, we reflected on some internal questions when it comes to how we are empowered to choose the way of love and grow in it as Christians when sin (anti-love feelings, thoughts and behaviour) continue to be active in our world and in our lives too. What role do Grace and the Holy Spirit play and what role does our free-will play?

In this final part under the theological topic 'Humanity', we explore briefly some of the practices in a Christian's life that help build strength and capacity for love to win in the face of fear leading to sin in our lives.

Worship: Worship is practiced in community, but it is a personal experience too. Integrating weekly worship is a wonderful way of strengthening and deepening the divine work of blossoming love in our lives through faith and hope planted in us.

Community fellowship & friendship: Whether within the walls of a church building, online connections or within our own social groups and networks, we need other people with whom we can connect on a faith level, who share our values of love above all other priorities and goals, and where care for one another is at the core of the relationships.

Prayer: Prayer is connection with God and the cultivation of intimacy with God. Prayer is asking and seeking for ourselves and others, but it is also listening to God speaking within. Sometimes it's hard to hear God speaking. Sometimes we even feel an absence or disconnection as we experience what mystics have called a "dark night of the soul." But God is speaking and our experience as Christians is of hearing God speak. Sometimes we must wait. But steadfastness and persistence are important qualities of faith we need for a life rooted in prayer.

Prayer is also energy. We have been called to become channels of divine healing energy through prayer: God moves into us and through us outward as our love is directed toward situations and persons. How and where healing energy moves is not ours to control, but we are invited to become channels of it through prayer.

Scripture: Learning the biblical story of God creating and guiding a people, leading to and centering on Jesus, and then moving into the early church through the Holy Spirit is an important practice of learning for all Christians. Whether through regular worship, extra opportunities for learning through bible study, or personal devotions, we all need guided learning of the core foundational understanding of our faith. The word “guided” is important. There is a community of bible study that is 2,000 years old and there are hundreds of scholars and teachers around the world today. Learning the biblical story properly must be a guided one rather than a solitary one, presuming we ourselves can understand an ancient story crafted by multiple authors and various genres.

Good books and other programs including therapy: There are many good books and there are various kinds of groups and personal one on one opportunities to help heal and grow body, mind and spirit. And all of this can serve to support faith, hope and love. What has helped and continues to help you grow in this regard? What may you yet discover going forward?

Nature, gardening, outdoor care of creation: As humans we have been created within a larger community of the natural world. Mother earth seeks communion with us. Our relationship as humans with her is a strained and broken one. By getting our hands into the soil, by caring for a part of creation by adopting a tree or growing a garden... all of this and more is highly beneficial for building up our spiritual life as Christians. This also includes hiking in nature and getting active outdoors in some way. What has helped you?

Personal and social practices: There are still more practices that can become important spiritually for our journey. There are all kinds of volunteering opportunities, caring for people, be they family or neighbours or through some organization or mission. Practicing our compassion tangibly is essential to being a Christian. Sometimes this can include marches and protests because we care about our world or those marginalized in our society or in other parts of the world. Anytime we exercise our voices and efforts because we care, it is the work of the Holy Spirit of Jesus energizing us. Every time we seek ways to build bridges of understanding toward peace, this is also the work of the Holy Spirit. Finally, how we use our money in what we buy and give is also a practice of growing our faith as Christians.

So much more to say... What have you discovered that may have surprised you, that has been instrumental in shaping your Christian life?