

Personal Growth

I want to grow – as a person and as a Christian. So I need to understand: what does this mean, and how can I best do it?

I need to be very clear about my objective. My task is to love my neighbour. It is not to solve their problems, fix their brokenness or heal their sickness: all those things might happen, and I would like them to happen, but they are not my task and not my responsibility.

I do not need to love my neighbour: all my deepest needs are already met. I am perfectly loved and completely accepted, just as I am and unconditionally; there is nothing I can do to make God love me more, and nothing I might do that would make God love me less.

God's Spirit lives within me, providing guidance and strength when I need them. I am not yet perfect, but my own ignorance and weakness, while real, are not an excuse to settle for less than the best possible expression of love for my neighbour. I do my best and work my hardest, not because everything depends upon me, but because that is how Jesus wants me to love, and that is how I grow into His likeness.

I work for impossible goals: that dead hearts may live and love, that God's Kingdom may grow in the dirt of our hatred and selfishness. Only impossible goals are worth pursuing: I could fill my life with small, achievable goals, but they would not take me anywhere worth going, or teach me anything worth knowing. If I only work for things I can achieve, I have no need of a God of miracles.

I still have lessons to learn, strength to gain and skills to master. At times, I am foolish, selfish, unkind and unloving. But my desire and my commitment is to love God with all I have and love my neighbour as I love myself. It is also to love my enemies and to love my sisters and brothers the way Jesus loves me.

I don't know how to love my neighbour, so I have to listen and keep on listening. I don't know what they want, what they are looking for, and I don't know how they will be able to find it. I can't tell my neighbour what to believe, what to do or what to seek, but I can help them consider, clearly and honestly, what they truly desire, I can help them identify the choices they are able to make here and now, I may be able to help them see their past differently, I can point them towards Jesus.

I want to love my neighbour, partly because I genuinely want to best for them, and partly because I benefit when my neighbour is happy and healthy. I want to love my neighbour, partly for their sake, partly to make Jesus happy, and partly because I want to be seen as good and kind, wise and loving. My motives will always be mixed, so I need to be careful that my own needs and desires do not lead me to do the wrong thing, but I also need to be careful that I do not hold back from doing the right thing simply because my motives are not pure enough. A cup of water will quench a thirst, whatever my motives may be for offering the cup.

Next steps

This was written by Paul Hazelden as a contribution to the *Strong Foundations* exploration. You are welcome to use it and distribute it how you like, but feedback would be appreciated.

- Is it helpful?
- Would you change anything?
- Would you like to talk about how we can learn from each other about how best to follow Jesus where we are?

You can contact me through the web form at mad-bristol or join the conversation on the *Strong Foundations* site.

- Web form: <http://mad-bristol.org.uk/contact/>
- Strong Foundations: <http://strongfoundations.pbworks.com>

Copyright © 2019 Paul Hazelden
Last updated: 22:43 on 23 April 2019, revision: 0.5
Location: /home/paul/C/SF/main/SF_Personal_Growth.odt