

Superintendents' Certification Lesson 1

Ten Ways to Nourish Your Soul

Learning Objectives:

- To verbalize the need to enhance the quality of our life by nurturing ourselves.
- To share concrete methods of self-nurture.
- To trace the circular effect of helping ourselves that enables us to help others.

Writer Joseph Goldstein tells of an experiment he did that helped him better understand the power of our speech to impact the mind. He decided that for a period of three months he would not speak about any third person. "That is, I wouldn't speak to someone about someone else."

Here is what came to light for him during that three-month experiment when he eradicated gossip from his life: "First my mind became much less judgmental because I wasn't giving voice to the various judgments in my mind . . . And as I judged others less, I found that I judged myself less as well. Second, I discovered in this experiment that about 90 percent of my speech was eliminated. This silence led to a lot more peace in my mind. It was astonishing to see so clearly how much time our talk is about other people."

The simple experiment Goldstein did proved to be emotionally expansive, spiritually enlightening, and soul nourishing for him. From time to time, all of us could enhance the quality of our living by considering ways to nurture our soul. Here are 10 suggestions:

1. See Christ in every person. This was the lesson Jesus emphasized in His parable of the sheep and goats ([Matt. 25:31-46](#)). That teaching is a clear reminder that we are to see Christ in every person and vivid motivation to treat individuals from all walks of life with equal courtesy and respect.

The story is told of a man who worked for a large corporation at their head office skyscraper. His only duty was to operate an elevator. Although there were three elevators servicing his side of the building, most people favored his elevator because he greeted everyone who entered through his doors with kindness and joy. One executive of the corporation frequently described the elevator operator saying: "This is our million-dollar employee. He is just as important as the top executives in our company because all our customers love him." When asked the secret of his popularity and influence, the elevator operator replied: "I look for God in everyone, and it gives me such joy."

2. Forgive yourself. D. Patrick Miller wrote *A Little Book of Forgiveness*. He offers this soul-nourishing wisdom: "Never forget that to forgive yourself is to release trapped energy that could be doing good work in the world. Thus, to judge and condemn yourself is a form of selfishness. Self-prosecution is never noble; it does no one a service." Just as you forgive others for their slights, misstatements, and errors of judgment, forgive yourself. Then move on (p. 63).

3. Learn to bend in order not to break. This is a favored proverb among seasoned mariners: "We cannot direct the wind, but we can adjust the sails." By that they mean we ought to adjust and adapt ourselves to circumstances over which we have no control. Resisting such events is not only counterproductive but can create even more problems. Go with the flow and learn to bend in order not to break.

Consider the lesson learned by one man who was “downsized” by his employer. His disappointment quickly turned into major depression when, after several months, he was unable to find a similar position with comparable salary. Then he decided to roll with the reality rather than remain depressed, anxious, and feeling helpless. He decided to volunteer at his local school and church. School officials were thrilled to have someone with his experience. The man also saw a doctor who prescribed an antidepressant. He began to help out at home and fell in love with his wife all over again. Deciding that money was no longer his main priority, he found a job at a lower salary. He said: “The loss of my job gave me back my life. I sent my former employer a thank-you note for firing me and giving me a new life.”

4. Maintain a spirit of goodwill. When dealing with other people, believe the best about them, see the best in them, hope for their best, and work for the best possible outcomes in your relationships with them.

In the Gospels it is clear that Jesus demonstrated goodwill toward the people He met. Jesus presumed the best about people. For example, He affectionately referred to those around Him as “friends” ([John 15:15](#)); “lambs” ([John 21:15](#)). And when He was crucified, Jesus continued presuming the best about people, praying: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” ([Luke 23:34](#)).

5. Give up revenge. “A man who studies revenge keeps his own wounds green,” observed philosopher Francis Bacon. Harboring ill will toward another and cultivating dreams of retaliation only keep inner anxiety and agitation alive. By giving up revenge you avoid compromising your own goodness and losing your moral advantage. Be guided by the insight of this Asian proverb: “He who seeks revenge, digs two graves.”

6. Create your own inspirational book. Of course, you can visit a bookstore and select from any number of fine inspirational books. But why not create your own personal and meaningful inspirational book? Buy a simple, blank spiral notebook. Then, whenever you come across an uplifting quotation, write it into your book. When you read a prayer that moves you, transcribe it into your book. Or write out Bible verses that you find to be especially encouraging. You can even illustrate your book by cutting out peaceful nature scenes from magazines: forests, lakes, rivers, majestic mountains, etc. Just leafing through your personal inspirational book will restore calmness to an anxious spirit and will brighten a moment with joy and pleasure.

7. Be a person of integrity. Say what you mean and mean what you say. Keep your life free of deception and duplicity. “Humans have a need to be moral. Living by time-honored values—honesty, generosity, kindness, respect—is good for our emotional and physical health,” says Hal Urban, Ph.D., author of *Life’s Greatest Lessons*. “Dishonesty—even the ‘everyone’s doing it’ kind—sucks up energy . . . Integrity, on the other hand, brings us peace of mind, increases our self-respect, and cements important relationships. When we form the habit of choosing integrity—action by small action—we become the people we were meant to be,” he adds (Interview: *Bottom Line Personal*, Jan. 15, 2002, p. 10).

8. Lavish others with kindness. Find creative ways to spontaneously and generously lavish other people with kindness. When it comes to acts of kindness, go the extra mile and double someone’s pleasure when you act.

“Self-prosecution is never noble; it does no one a service” (D. Patrick Miller, *A Little Book of*

Forgiveness, p. 94).

One day a woman entered a New York City soup kitchen and donated a beautiful diamond ring. The director, Dorothy Day, received it graciously. The mission workers wondered what Day would do with it. Would she take it to a diamond merchant and sell it? That act would certainly have been understandable since the ring would easily bring a sizeable cash gift to the mission. That afternoon Day gave the diamond ring to an old woman who lived alone and often came to the mission for her meals. "That ring would have paid her rent for the better part of a year," someone criticized Day. However, Dorothy Day replied that the woman could sell it if she liked and spend the money for rent, a trip to the Bahamas, or keep the ring to admire. "Do you suppose God created diamonds only for the rich?" she asked her critic.

9. Seek out beauty daily. "Walk in the park. Listen to music. Buy yourself flowers. Connecting with the beauty of the world around you is deeply healing," writes Mike Riley, coauthor with Howard Bronson of *How to Heal a Broken Heart in 30 Days: A Day-by-Day Guide to Saying Good-bye and Getting on With Your Life*, p. 12).

10. Practice citizenship. Writer Howard Fast once observed: "Patriotism . . . applies to true love of one's country and a code of conduct that echoes such love" (*Quotationary*, p. 500). Show pride in your country by working to make the lives of every citizen better. Your own spirit will be elevated knowing that you had a hand at improving the lot of another person.

Consider the example of Rose Espinoza who recently moved back to her childhood community of La Habra, California. When she was growing up, La Habra was a close-knit community where people cared about one another, a great place to raise a family. She said, "To my shock, La Habra had turned into a town where gangs of kids roamed the streets making trouble." Her husband observed: "Looks like those kids don't have anywhere to go when school's out." His observation was enough to send Rose into action.

With a folding table and a few chairs, she and her husband converted their garage into a makeshift classroom. Then they passed flyers out around the neighborhood offering to tutor for a few hours every day after school. When the garage door opened in September 1991, kids came in droves—both to learn and to hang out in a safe place.

Whenever a new student wanted to join, Rose asked their parents to help by tutoring kids in subjects such as English, math, and writing. Other parents were persuaded to help by providing snacks or setting up the area. Older students tutored younger ones. When there was no more room in the garage, kids spread out across the lawn to do their homework. Today, there are three additional tutoring sites in La Habra, all outfitted with books, desks, and computers.