
“Diagnosing Our Spiritual Lives”, Part 2
Pastor Peter Yi
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Introduction:

If we were to ask ourselves the question, what would it look like if I were more spiritual, what would we conclude? What elements what I possess if I were a spiritual person. So...let me suggest a few.

1. Gave tithes faithfully
2. Cared about theology
3. Had good bible knowledge
4. Could teach spiritual matters to others
5. Kept the Sabbath holy
6. Keep himself from bad company
7. Prayed regularly
8. Consistent church attendance
9. Fasted regularly

Sounds like a pretty good and thorough list doesn't it? But, if you think about it, that's a description of the Pharisees. And when you look at the way Jesus interacted with Pharisees, it wasn't pretty. He was pretty harsh with them, because basically, every they did was for show and not for God. So I think what we can learn from this is that we really have to get over trying to please people and look good in front of them to begin the journey of spirituality. We have to be honest with ourselves and we must remove pride and be filled with humility.

So let's continue looking at the qualities of a spiritually healthy person. We're going through ten specific qualities. Last week we looked at three of them.

1. Am I thirsting for God more?
2. Am I living my life more and more guided by God's word?
3. Am I becoming more loving toward other people?

And today we'll look at three more

Am I More Aware of God's Presence?

This test is just asking yourself, "Do I regularly sense the presence of God in my life?" Here are some test questions.

- "When was the last time your heart was moved by a sermon, either to tears or joy or conviction?"
- "When was the last time worship was not just singing words – ink on plastic, but was a deep passionate communion with the Creator and lover of your soul?"
- "When was the last time God spoke to you in your quiet time, through the Scriptures or in a quiet voice in your heart?"

- Were there recent moments in your experience with nature where you marveled at the Creator, where you were humbled by your small-ness in such a majestic world?
- When was the last time you truly sensed God's protection in a dangerous situation, or his guidance when you were lost?

Jonathan Edwards, the spiritual giant of the Great Spiritual Awakening that rocked both England and America in the mid 1700s, shares such a moment.

Sometimes, only mentioning a single word caused my heart to burn within me; or only seeing the name of Christ, or the name of some attribute of God. And God has appeared glorious to me, on account of the Trinity. It has made me have exalting thoughts of God, that he subsists in three persons; Father, Son and Holy Ghost. The sweetest joys and delights I have experienced, have not been those that have arisen from a hope of my own good estate; but in a direct view of the glorious things of the gospel. When I enjoy this sweetness, it seems to carry me above the thoughts of my own estate; it seems at such times a loss that I cannot bear, to take off my eye from the glorious, pleasant object I behold without me, to turn my eye in upon myself, and my own good estate. (What he's saying in this last sentence is, What a waste to think only about myself, when I have something as glorious as the gospel of Christ in front of me.) He continues...

Once, as I rode out into the woods for my health, in 1737, having alighted from my horse in a retired place, as my manner commonly has been, to walk for divine contemplation and prayer, I had a view that for me was extraordinary, of the glory of the Son of God, as Mediator between God and man, and his wonderful, great, full, pure and sweet grace and love, and meek and gentle condescension. This grace that appeared so calm and sweet, appeared also great above the heavens. The person of Christ appeared ineffably excellent with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thought and conception ... which continued as near as I can judge, about an hour; which kept me the greater part of the time in a flood of tears, and weeping aloud. I felt an ardency of soul to be, what I know not otherwise how to express, emptied and annihilated; to lie in the dust, and to be full of Christ alone; to love him with a holy and pure love; to trust in him; to live upon him; to serve and follow him; and to be perfectly sanctified and made pure, with a divine and heavenly purity. I have, several other times, had views very much of the same nature, and which have had the same effects.

There are different ways to be more and more aware of the presence of God in our lives. Here are some Biblical examples that Donald Whitney mentions.

1. The universal presence of God – God's omnipresence. It's thinking about Psalm 139, where the psalmist marvels at the way God created humans, and he says, **7** Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? **8** If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
2. The Christological presence of God – we get to experience the presence of God in Christ. Jesus is Immanuel, God with us. And he promises us, "Surely I am with you always to the very end of the age", in Matthew 28.
3. There is then the indwelling presence of God – the Holy Spirit. We are called temples of the Holy Spirit because he resides within each of us. So you and I, and everyone who is Christian can and should experience the presence of all three persons of the Trinity in our regular experiences.
4. There is also the perceptible presence of God – through his work or influence. I see God in that person and in that situation.
5. The heavenly presence of God – the dwelling place of God. "Heaven is my throne."
6. The eternal presence of God – that will be enjoyed by his children for all eternity.

How do you do it? Here's what Whitney says. Seek God's presence through his Word. Seek him through experiences that are rooted in his Word. Seek him through daily life in ways that are informed by His Word.

Why is the Word in all these ways? Because we can easily God the way we want to see Him and thus create an idol. Instead we must see God in the way that he has revealed himself in Scripture.

So that is another way to see if our spiritual lives are healthy. If it's been quite some time since you've sensed God, then you have some work to do.

Do you care for the material and spiritual needs of others?

You know sometimes we hear the word 'spiritual' or 'spirituality' and we make such a big deal out of that word. We raise up really high what we think it might mean to be considered 'spiritual'. We think of people living a monastic life. We think of those Christians who have international influence like the Rick Warrens and Mother Teresas and others. And we must think they are so spiritual because God just decided to give them special privileges and favors that are beyond the reach of us ordinary persons. But do you know what I've realized as I've had the chance here and there to meet some of these folks face to face, is they are all really normal people just like me. And I think what has happened is that we are a culture obsessed with celebrities. So it doesn't matter if it's the hottest male or female actor, or some one hit wonder musician, or even a popular Christian pastor or author, we over celebrate these people and make them out to be more than they really are.

But scripture teaches us that to be spiritual is really simple. It's not merely going off to retreat centres and seeking the face of God. That's a part of it. Part of what it means to be a healthy Christian is to have a growing concern for the physical and spiritual well-being of others. So that doesn't sound very spiritual, but to have this concern is a sign of our spiritual health.

Part of the reason why many of us are so spiritually unhealthy is because we are overly narcissistic in our faith. It's because we tend to only look inwardly. We tend to say, I've got enough problems that I need to be working on, I don't have time to deal with other people's problems. And that's a cause of spiritual unhealth. Think about our physical bodies. A person who can't expel isn't healthy. You can't just intake air, you have to exhale. You can't just eat food and water, you have to expend it in energy and waste. The expending of energy in our bodies through exercise, everyone would agree, is healthy. And the exact same principle applies to our spiritual health. Not only do we need healthy doses of spiritual input. We need equal amounts of spiritual output.

Again, let's ask ourselves some questions.

- Are our prayers littered with the names of other people?
- I know we give money to the church, but do we give our money to others who are in need? *I remember after Linda and I were married and we were struggling financially and there was a dear brother of mine was wasn't that much more off than we were and out of the blue he gave us a check for a hundred dollars.*
- Do we make time for others? Volunteering at a nursing home, taking care of the needs of single mothers. Tutoring without pay for someone who can't afford it.

Here's what it says in James 2:15-16 "15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?"

James 1:27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Our religion is a religion that is intensely concerned about the needs of others.

We know from Scripture that the primary need of every person is spiritual, but we don't address the spiritual needs apart from the physical needs. And often times in will be meeting the physical needs that will open the door to minister to spiritual needs.

My advice...just start somewhere. Just start. Don't over think it. Just start.

Do I delight in the bride of Christ?

When I look at my own spiritual journey, for the longest time, I didn't get church. I was like, what's the big deal? Isn't my own personal spirituality the main thing? Perhaps it was because my spiritual journey began on campus. Or perhaps it's because in my upbringing I had gone through so many church splits and all the church politics. Or perhaps it was because I really hadn't seen what a healthy church looked like until way into my adulthood. But for all those reasons and more, I didn't get what the big deal was about the church. Yeah, I knew I had to attend church, but more because I was taught, you go to church or you get beat, not you go to church because church is the most amazing thing on earth. It is the focus of Christ's affections. It is the apple of his eye. And because Christ loves the church, I should love the church. That, when I was young, I never learned. Maybe some of you have gone through the same stuff and you're still wondering, what's the big deal about church?

I think the answer can come from the metaphor of marriage. There are few things more beautiful than marriage. The love and commitment a man and woman will have for each other, is quite the thing. And the template for marriage is always the relationship between Jesus and the church. The bible teaches us that next to God, the thing that Jesus really loves and delights in the most is His bride. Let's look at Ephesians 5.

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing^b her by the washing with water through the word,²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.²⁹ After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—³⁰for we are members of his body.³¹ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."^c ³²This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

This passage is probably the most incredible passage that describes the relationship between Jesus and the church.

He laid his life down for her. He placed the church in a partnership with himself to accomplish God's mission.

Now here's the sort of strange thing. Even though we are the ones that make up the church and we ourselves, as the church, are the objects of Christ's deep and sacrificial love. But at the same time, we too are to love the church.

Now this is probably review for most of you, but by the church, we don't mean the building, because never is that what the bible meant. And by church, we don't mean only the organization. By church, we mean the people of the church. So, to state the question again, "Do you love this body of Christians here at Young Nak?" Are there few things you'd rather do than be with these people? Worship with them? And Serve with them? To hear God's voice together with them?

And so we are to delight in this imperfect community called the church because that's what Christ delights in. Here are some reasons we delight in the church.

When the local church comes together for worship the presence of God is in their midst in a special way.

1 Cor 3:16 Paul says, "You are the temple of God...the Spirit of God dwells in you."

2 Cor 6:16 states, "For you are the temple of the Living God."

Ephesians 2:22, "You also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit."

And so the reason we can delight in the church is because it's in the church that the presence of God dwells among ordinary people. Many of us gather for Sunday morning worship and then we go out for lunch and then you share a coffee, and then when you have nothing left to do, you might hang out at someone's house, catch a movie. Why? It's because we love each other's company as fellow Christians.

At the same time we delight in the church's work because we know that God's plans for the world will be accomplished not primarily in the world of finance and economics or in the world of politics. It will be through local churches.

So what can we do to delight in her more? Love the church as Jesus does. Serve in the church. See your gifts and involvement as significant in the building of Christ's community.

Conclusion:

Continue, during this sermon series, during the season of lent, to look inwardly and begin to diagnose your spirituality. If it's at a place of unhealth, then begin to make strides in improving your health, in particular today, deepening your awareness of the presence of God, caring for the practical and spiritual needs of others. And delighting more in the bride of Christ.