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## “Diagnosing Our Spiritual Lives, Part 3”

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### Introduction:

Just so we're up to speed, about a month ago we starting looking at what a healthy spiritual life looks like, asking ourselves what spiritual qualities we should possess. And we set out to look at ten different things and we covered six of them. As a review here's what we looked at already. If you want to revisit them go ahead and check out the website, it's all there.

1. a growing thirst for God
2. a life that's more and more guided by God's word
3. becoming more loving
4. more aware of God's presence
5. caring for the material and spiritual needs of others
6. delight in the church, the bride of Christ

Today we'll be looking at the remaining four qualities that we will help us assess where we are in our spiritual lives.

### Are spiritual disciplines increasingly important to me?

What are the spiritual disciplines? Well, according to Donald Whitney, “The spiritual disciplines are God-ordained means by which we bring ourselves before God, experience Him, and are changed into Christlikeness.”

Some people don't like the word discipline. It conjures up images of nuns with sticks or standing in the corner of the room holding a chair over your head. So as soon as you hear the word discipline, you could be turned off. No worries. Let's call them spiritual exercises. What if you have an aversion to the word exercise? Well get a thesaurus.

Spiritual disciplines or exercises are important because we don't come to know the Lord in a haphazard or random way or on terms that we decide. Like a kid who says, “Bible readings for losers, I'm gonna meet God through video games. I'm going to make that my spiritual discipline.” That won't work. The Lord has given us certain and specific means by which we get to know him and become more spiritual.

There are two categories of disciplines and we need to be regularly practicing both of them. One type are the individual disciplines and the other, you guessed it, are the corporate disciplines. Most all of us have experienced one or more of these. The individual ones include, fasting, prayer, private reading and meditation of Scripture, solitude, and spiritual journaling. The corporate ones include congregational worship, corporate prayer (prayer meetings), communion, and fellowship.

Richard Foster, who was teaching at our church last month and is the author of the book, Celebration of Discipline, divides them into 3 categories. Inward, outward and corporate. The inward disciplines are: meditation, prayer, fasting, and study  
The outward disciplines are: simplicity, solitude, submission, and service.

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The corporate disciplines are: confession, worship, guidance, and celebration.

These disciplines are **first** of all biblical. **Secondly** these biblical disciplines are sufficient for every aspect of our spiritual growth. They don't need to be added to or taken away from. So you don't ever reach a point where you say, okay, I've done all of them, what's next? There's no next. We just continue developing in them.

Whitney says that the blessings of these disciples may overlap, but are unique and distinct. So neglecting one may mean depriving ourselves of one or more of God's blessings. And finally Whitney makes a key point in saying that the disciplines are practices, not attitudes. The disciplines don't determine your spiritual character, they aid in developing them. Spiritual character is determined by the Fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians 5.

So to improve your spiritual health it will require some work. Many of these disciplines you and I will need to practice to experience growth.

Friends, before I move on to the next point, will you consider and then commit to doing one or more of the disciplines? Prayer, Scripture, solitude, journaling, and fasting, worship, service, simplicity.

We'll hopefully look more deeply into a few of these in the coming months.

### **Do I still grieve over sin?**

When I observe the life of Paul in his letters and the book of Acts, I observe in him, that as time progresses, a greater awareness of his wickedness and sinfulness before God. You would think the opposite--that he would be getting holier and holier, but the opposite seems to be happening. He becomes increasingly more aware of his own sinfulness. Near the end of his life Paul wrote these words.

NIV 1 Timothy 1:16 But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

That is the great paradox of the Christian life. As we draw closer and closer to God, yes we really do become more and more holy. However we also realize how much more unholy we really are. *The example I like to use is that of spacecraft traveling to the sun.*

Many Christians can come to a sense of thinking that since they've been Christians for 10-20 years that they are no longer that bad. We can easily say things like, "I don't swear anymore, I don't get drunk, I don't read unhealthy books or listen to secular music, I give my money to God and my church attendance is regular." We can fool ourselves into thinking that we've arrived, instead of growing in an increased perception and realization of our own wickedness. I want to quote to you from Jonathan Edwards again. Here's what he writes in his journal one day.

*I have had a vastly greater sense of my own wickedness, and the badness of my heart, than ever I had before my conversion. It has often appeared to me that if God should mark iniquity against me I should appear the very worst of all mankind—of all that have been, since the beginning of the world to this time, and that I should have by far the lowest place in hell.*

*My wickedness, as I am in myself, has long appeared to me perfectly ineffable, and swallowing up all thought and imagination; like an infinite deluge or mountains over my head. I know not how to express better what my sins appear to me to be than by heaping infinite upon infinite, and multiplying infinite by infinite. Very often, for these many years, these expressions are in my mind, and in my mouth, "Infinite upon infinite...infinite upon infinite!" When I look into my heart, and take a view of my wickedness, it looks like an abyss infinitely deeper than hell."*

Is that healthy Christianity? Shouldn't we just focus on the fact that we're forgiven? We're saints, not sinners, right? Well, sort of.

Do you remember the day when you grieved over your sins the day you became a Christian? We wept over our wickedness and how we hurt God. We confessed before Him all the evil things we did. But don't we find that as we mature in our Christian lives that God begins to reveal not so much our actions, but now our attitudes? Before it was the hands, now it's the heart. Before it was outward, now it's inward. It may have been a foul mouth before, but now it's dealing w/ anger. He starts probing at our pride, our self-centeredness, our desires, our thoughts, our careless words. He's not just seeing if we're giving offering, he's looking at our motives. He's not just seeing if we're serving the church, but asking us why we're serving?

We need to always view sin the way God views sin. As evil, wicked, disobedient and against him. We need to remember that sin was the reason Christ had to die. Sin result in punishment and distance and hell.

Grieving over sin is a healthy sign of our spirituality. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." It's a mourning over our spiritual bankruptcy.

NIV 2 Corinthians 7:10 Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

It's easy to become hardened to sin and become comfortable with sin and begin to not notice sin. That is not healthy. We need to keep our hearts tender. We need to examine our lives and grieve and repent at the sin that's there – like the publican who cried out, "Have mercy on me Lord, a sinner."

How do we do that practically? Make confession a part of your regular prayers. When the scriptures reveal a sinful act, make sure to apply it to your own life to see if you've committed it. Examine w/ the Holy Spirit's help what areas, you might be compromising, no longer calling sin, what once for you was so obviously sin.

### **Am I a quicker forgiver?**

James Coulter said, "The unforgiving spirit...is the number one killer of the spiritual life."

Christ saw forgiveness as so important that if you don't, then don't come to church, don't present your offerings before him. And he also said that forgiveness was so important that if you don't forgive others, God won't forgive you.

So how important is it to forgive? Extremely important. It will kill our prayer life and it will lead to other sins like anger and bitterness and hatred and malice and envy, covetousness.

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*Here is what British pastor Martin Lloyd-Jones says, "I say to the glory of God and in utter humility that whenever I see myself before God and realize even something of what my blessed Lord has done for me, I am ready to forgive anybody anything."*

That happened to me while in college. I became a Christian during my first year and God started digging up all these things. And the thing he surfaced was the hatred I had for my father. And after a lot of prayer and with God's grace, I forgave him. And the reason I forgave him and the reason I'm able to forgive people who've wronged me today...is knowing that he's a sinner and I'm a sinner and Jesus has taken or will take care of those sins, ultimately, in one of two ways. 1) Hell. 2) the Cross. That's how Jesus will deal with sin. While you and I are living and as we suffer wrongs and injustices, we are called to forgive.

Some of us are stunted in our growth because we have an unforgiving and bitter spirit. The other person has moved on and grown in leaps and bounds, but you might be stuck, because you can't forgive.

Our model of forgiveness is Jesus. Christ is our model as he hung on the cross when he said, "father forgive them."

Our reason for forgiveness is because we, ourselves have been forgiven by God.

Unforgiveness doesn't hurt anyone but yourself. Cultivate a forgiving spirit and you will grow in your spirituality.

### **Do I long for heaven and to be with Jesus?**

*There was this one summer, probably the busiest I've ever had. It was several years ago. I went to two mission trip, three retreats. I think I was hope for about one week during the two months of that summer. The tail end of the summer was a mission trip to Kyrgyzstan. I went for the first time to this country, expecting to have a phenomenal life changing experience, but I hated it. During that trip, I injured my knee and was immobilized or handicapped for much of the trip. And then I wasn't leading the trip. I was just a member. I don't know if you experience this, but when you lead a team, you don't have time to miss home. You don't have time to be idle. So during this trip I had a lot of down time to think. And what I thought of was home. And as each day went by the time seemed to go slower and I was growing more and more homesick. I wanted to get back home and see my wife and my kids.*

Now I share this experience because as sons and daughters of God, our hearts should ache with an incredible homesickness to be with our heavenly Father and our and Savior Jesus Christ. We should be echoing the burden the apostle Paul had when he didn't know if it was better for him to die or to stay alive in Philippians 1. And he said...what's better is to die because I get to be with Jesus. But I'll stay alive so I can serve his people.

Whitney says that growing Christians are groaning Christians. They long to be w/ Christ.

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I think the culture we live in does so much to try and *live*. Medicines, healthcare, technology. Pages and pages devoted to living a longer life. Even when we have a loved one who dies early we ourselves or others say, “What a shame.”

Ask yourself, “Who’s better off? Me living here in this world looking through a fuzzy glass at our God, or the person who’s in heaven looking at their creator face-to-face?”

We long for heaven because we’re tired of sin and we groan because we ache to see Jesus face to face.

Friends, in your prayer, yearn for the Lord. Tell him you miss him and you can’t wait to see him.

**Conclusion:**

It was Socrates who said, “A life not examined, is a life not worth living.” I ask you this day, this week, to examine your spiritual lives. Take an inventory and see what needs to restocked. See what items are stale and old and need to be removed.

Let’s each strive to grow toward a healthy spirituality. It will be a blessing to you, to others, and to God.

