

## Spiritual Health

When asked how to best maintain spiritual health, the usual response would be sufficient prayer and possibly doing some good deeds. That surely is correct, but the spiritual nature of a person is more complex than that. It is spirit that brings life to a person. It is spirit in which every emotion and experience of a person is held. Spiritual health is complex and reaches far wider than what usually is considered as the 'spiritual' in life.

Jesus always stated first up the need for a love of God – his Father. But he also spent much time in how to deal with life in general – a life in community. That life involves our whole personhood. The outworking of that determines our spiritual health. If I care about the health of my spirit, which significantly affects my wellbeing, I must acknowledge that prayer and good deeds are a start. But more is needed. I must learn to approach life overall correctly. It is quite a challenge and I will come up short many a time. Which of course is no excuse for not trying. Jesus appreciates a good try in getting life right and will reward it in ways only he can bestow.

It is easier to detect when I'm going wrong than what I might be doing right. Perhaps that is why the Ten Commandments all begin with 'You shall not!' It sounds negative, but is utterly practical. I will be pulled up in my spirit soon enough when about to make a mistake or having made one. When not so arrested, I simply assume that I'm doing okay. The Lord seems to have a way of giving me warning signs when I slip up. In that I put my trust.

Life is a subtle business. I have found that my disposition towards others and situations need continual attention. Often I must put a check on my thinking. A wrong outlook will always reduce my spiritual wellbeing. Jesus was utterly clear on how important this is. Some of his statements border on the impossible. 'Bless your enemies,' he said. But why would I wish the best for an enemy?

It only makes sense, if this response preserves something worthwhile that would otherwise be lost. And that is exactly why Jesus spoke as he did. If I let the situation with my enemy grind negatively in my spirit, who will be the loser? Also, retaliation may well start a feud that lasts a long time with people being hurt. Serious unrests have resulted from this. That is unlikely in my situations. But the same principle holds with those everyday minor occurrences that come my way and are irritating. There is no enemy involved here. At least not, if I hold my tongue.

Not that Christians should be doormats. Jesus surely was not. The key is knowing when to turn the other cheek, when to submit to longsuffering. This asks for wisdom and the Lord has plenty available. I must not allow 'emotional infections' to fester. Must clean out the wound. Somehow, I

must work that through with Jesus and keep my spirit healthy. When I'm hurt, I must forgive. Easier said than done, I well know it. It is, however, a wise move.

There is a far more subtle, and more usual, danger in coming up short relationally. It concerns a diminishing of the value of a person for no other reason than that I have decided to let that happen in my spirit. When I think lowly of someone, or even discard them. Racism is an obvious example. So are myriad of lesser situations. I will never fully get on top of this negativity, for it is so utterly human, but I must resist it. My spiritual health is at stake.

What is this negativity within me really about? And not just in me – in everyone. Society is full of it. Stereotyping is a good example and of late on the internet, cyber bullying. It is soul destroying with potentially catastrophic outcomes. It means arbitrarily putting someone down. It is a powerful standover tactic and most manipulative.

Cyber bullying itself is an expression of a much larger phenomenon. I would call it 'value bullying'; devaluing someone and thinking about that person in a degrading fashion. Perhaps simply because I don't like what she looks like or where he comes from. Everyone falls into that trap regularly without fail. Though usually harmless, it still is wrong. I should arrest my thinking.

Humanity suffers from a deep negative need to brand others as undesirable and to power it over them. When forcefully and widely expressed it may be considered as 'value branding'. It can have enormous consequences in society. In the extreme, it leads to the reigns of Hitler and Stalin and more recently Islamic State. 'Value branding' is a nasty business.

Jesus knew its dangers well. Therefore, he insisted on not calling someone a fool. It is important for a person not to become devalued. My dislikes must be curtailed. I must keep renewing the spirit of my mind. Otherwise my spiritual health will be affected. If I make a mistake, which I'm bound to do, I must rectify my approach and mentally bless that person instead.

That may well seem a bridge too far, and will be, if I focus on my feelings. Those do not change that easily. From a dislike I don't suddenly feel great about a person. Therefore, the deciding factor is my thinking. I must change my thoughts. That will be sufficient. In doing so, my spiritual health will glow that little brighter. Of course, I have every right to disagree with the other, but without an attitude of superiority.

Becoming spiritually healthy is a whole of person activity. Even taking insufficient care of my body will affect spiritual wellbeing. So what is a simple way in which to stay alert to the dangers? The Great Commandment sums it up nicely: Love God totally and your neighbour as yourself. In the understanding, that if you truly understand God's love, you will discover a self-acceptance that makes it possible to be kind on yourself, shun what is bad and enjoy the good. It is the road to spiritual health.

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If you have found this interesting, please consider my books in which much more is explained about God and the reality of an authentic Christian perspective on life – the benefits that offers.

Thank you,

Michael