

Oct 1, 2011 Florida Hospital Seventh-day Adventist Church
Romans 14 Spirituality: What It Isn't What It Is by Andy McDonald

It wasn't that long ago that my wife was visiting with a work colleague. They were discussing some matter of spiritual life, some issue of faith or Biblical teaching, and this friend said something interesting. The statement made by this friend helps us to see the challenge we face in the series of messages we begin today. The friend said, "I'm a very spiritual person but not very religious!"

What does that mean: "I'm a very spiritual person but I'm not very religious?"

I think what this person was saying is that I'm not big into doing the church thing. I'm in touch with some inner part of who I am that is in some strong way connected with God, but I don't put much stock in religion, church, denomination, theological debate, traditional religious practices.

In the current cultural environment this isn't all that surprising.

Maybe people's experience with churches and very religious people have caused a separation of the concepts of being religious and being spiritual.

What does it mean to be religious? It is a word rarely used in scripture. Only a handful of times in the whole Bible.

The dictionary definition is what I think was being referred to when this friend said "I'm not very religious"

The dictionary says religious is characterized by adherence to religion: pious, or concerned with religion, or belonging to a monastic order, exact, scrupulous.

What has happened for so many people today is a disillusion with religion, with organized religion. We've studied the crusades and we

know the stories of the middle ages and the abuses of the Christian Church. Many of us remember Christians in Northern Ireland blowing each other up in the name of their view of church. We see the violence around the world today in the name of religion. And of course we've all encountered religious hypocrisy, if nowhere else, at least in the mirror, and so it may flow naturally that more and more people are seeking for something, some kind of connection with something bigger and beyond themselves and yet that connects to that inner person, that core being of who we are.

So today we find people throwing around the word spirituality.

It get's talked about on talk shows.

Whole PBS specials are aired with presenters fostering spirituality

Today spirituality covers everything from a recreational sport for the bored, to a serious commitment to live deeply and fully in relation to God.

Eugene Peterson struggles with defining this word, writing that, "the term has escaped the discipline of the dictionary." We use words to delimit, to move to greater specificity, to precisely define. But spirituality names something indefinable and yet recognizable. Peterson suggests—transcendence vaguely intermingled with intimacy. Transcendence—a sense that there is more—that life extends beyond me, beyond what I get paid, beyond what my family thinks of me, beyond my cholesterol count. And Intimacy—a sense that deep within me there is a core being inaccessible to most but yet knowable.

So What does it mean to be Spiritual? It has something to do with transcendence and intimacy this beyond us and within us.

When Paul writes to young Timothy he gives him this counsel.

1 Timothy 4:7 "Do not waste time arguing over godless ideas and old wives tales. Spend your time and energy in training yourself for

spiritual fitness. (other versions translate it “Train yourself to be godly” or discipline yourself for the purposes of God.”

I particularly like Hebrews 6:9-12 where it clearly teaches that the way to stay spiritually alive is to “keep right on loving others as long as life lasts...then you won’t become spiritually dull and indifferent.”

When we put a number of texts together from the sermon on the mount to the little book of 1 Peter we come to understand that Biblically being spiritual is about living all of life as God-derived, God-sustained, and God-blessed. Like the Psalmist wrote in Psalm 116:9 “I walk before the Lord in the land of the living.”

But when we speak of spirituality we must remember how messed up the word has become. Here’s at least a little of the history of this important term.

Paul used the adjective “spiritual” to refer to the actions or attitudes derived from the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the early Christians.

By the time of the medieval church the term had come to refer to the lives of monks and nuns who were called “spiritual” Christians because they took certain vows and were viewed in contrast to the lives of men and women who married, raised families, and got their hands dirty in the fields and markets of the world. It fostered a separation of Christians into two groups the “general Christian” and the “Spiritual Christian.”

So Spirituality came to designate the study and practice of a perfect life before God, of extraordinary holiness in the Christian life.

Peterson explains that the term came into our common language through a movement in 17th cent France among Catholic laity who rose up to declare that the monasteries had no corner on the Christian life

well-lived. The religious leaders used the term spiritual or spirituality to put down these laypeople who practiced their devotion too intensely.

But there was no turning back and Spiritual seriousness was what Puritan's would call godliness, and Methodists perfection and Lutheran's pietism—basically it moved from early church usage where it was something for every follower of Jesus to the exclusive property of the monastic life, to a journey back to accessibility to everyone again.

Now anybody can be spiritual.

But what does that mean?

If someone came to you and asked, "How do I become spiritual?" what would you tell them?

Well the most traditional answer is to Pray, Read your Bible, and join in Worship of God with other Christians.

It is logical from a study of Scripture to assume that Christians seeking for more spirituality in their lives would participate in these three activities.

But before we go to How maybe we should ask "Why?"

Why would you wish to become more spiritual?
What is behind seeking of spirituality?

This may seem like an unnecessary step in our investigation of Spirituality but I believe there are two good reasons to ask the Why?

The first is our tendency to idolatry. No I'm not terribly concerned about our building huge temples to heathen gods, or building or carving an idol we bow down to each day. But I think we would all do well to check for the more subtle idolatry of reducing God a concept or object that we can use for our benefit. And we can seek spirituality as some

magic God connection that can bring us superior performance, enhanced life, just the edge we need for personal advancement.

The second reason curiosity about why we want to be more spiritual is that it may be that we are tempted to believe that old lie of the devil, you will be like God, and that self-development spiritually becomes an attempt to be like God by our being more spiritual rather than by God's transformation of us by his grace.

We must remember that the journeys to spirituality are as varied as the human race. Too often when something helped us on our journey we share it not as a possibly helpful tool on your spiritual journey but we make it into a must, a have too.

But while there may be similarities, while there may be some river's of thought and practice, in the end each of our spiritual journeys is unique to us.

Interview of person from congregation:

This is _____

Tell me do you have any siblings. Tell me about them.

What kind of relationship did you each have with your Dad?

How did you relate differently? How did you each ask for things?

Did you each do the same fun stuff or did you each have unique relationships?

How do you think it would have worked if your brother or sister insisted that unless you relate to Dad their way that you didn't really have a relationship? How would your sibling have responded if you had insisted that unless they related to Dad the exact same as you that they couldn't really have a relationship with Dad?

Amazing, but don't we do that to one another in the church and beyond the church? If you don't understand scripture like I do than you can't know Dad! Or If you don't pray the way I pray you can't have a relationship with Dad! Or If you don't worship the way I do and enjoy

connecting with God through the music that connects me than you can't have a connection with God!

We have to get over ourselves. Celebrate that you are a divine original. God has created you like no other creature in all the universe—enjoy that unique privilege and don't deny it to anyone else.

Romans 15:7 says it well, “So accept each other just as Christ has accepted you; then God will be glorified.”

The reality is that diverse thinking will bring us better decisions. Research in last month's Harvard Business Review shows that having people on your team who think differently and who won't hold back their private understandings, will bring that team to better decisions than if everyone thinks the same.

Especially in matters of Spirituality this is so true because it is more art than science. And that piece of the puzzle that might repulse one appeals to another and all the pieces are important for the most accurate picture of God to be seen.

You may not be tracking with me but let me use two Biblical characters to illustrate. One is the most spiritual person who ever lived and the other one was declared by the most spiritual person ever as being the greatest.

Jesus and John the Baptist cousins but in so many ways different as night and day.

While Jesus could call to accountability and preach judgment as well as any as evidenced in his 7 woes to the Pharisees recorded in Matthew 23, generally speaking we think of Jesus as promising rest to those who are weary. He is the restorer of health, vision, hearing. He lays down his life. He is the way the truth and the life.

John the Baptist was all about fire and brimstone. Listen to Matthew's description of John.

In those days John the Baptist began preaching in the Judean wilderness. His message was, Turn from your sins and turn to God because the Kingdom of Heaven is near. ...John's clothes were woven from camel hair, and he wore a leather belt; his food was locusts and wild honey....when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to be baptized he denounced them, "You brood of snakes."

In contrast is Jesus at Matthew's home eating with tax collectors and other notorious sinners. The Pharisees asked the disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with such scum?" When Jesus heard this Jesus replied, "Healthy people don't need doctor—sick people do"...The disciples of John asked Jesus, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples don't fast?"

On day Jesus said to the crowd. "How shall I describe this generation? With what will I compare them? They are like a group of children playing a game in the public square. They complain to their friends, "We played wedding songs, and you weren't happy, so we played funeral songs, but you weren't sad" For John the Baptist didn't drink wine and he often fasted, and you say, 'He's demon possessed.' And I, the Son of man, feast and drink, and you say "He's a glutton and a drunkard, and a friend of the worst sort of sinners!"

Different personalities
Different focused ministries,
Different styles of work

But who would argue against the spirituality of either. It isn't to be "just like John or just like Jesus" in style, and flavor, and methods, and preferences of action.

But to join their "Common Ground" To seek God in his transcendent totally other, different from us, bigger and wiser, his ways not our

ways, his thoughts not our thoughts and to seek God in the connectedness to our inner core.

It won't look the same. It may stand in as stark a contrast as Jesus and John, but it will bear fruit.

In the letter to the Hebrews are these words chapter 6:11 & 12
 Our great desire is that you will keep right on loving others as long as life lasts, in order to make certain that what you hope for will come true. Then you will not become spiritually dull and indifferent. Instead, you will follow the example of those who are going to inherit God's promises because of their faith and patience."

I invite you to greater spirituality. But as we seek this let's remember

Spirituality is not easily defined but it is recognizable

Spirituality developing practice for you might or might not be helpful to another person

Spirituality is as varied as the human population now two relations are the same

Spirituality is not style dependent—There is John the Baptist style, and Jesus style, and your style.

I invite you to identify all of life as God—derived, God—sustained, and God—blessed.

Come and let's walk before the Lord in the land of the living.

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