

November 5, 2011 Florida Hospital Seventh-day Adventist Church
Philippians 3:12-14 Destination or Journey by Andy McDonald

Our series on “Spirituality- what it is and what it isn’t” ends today. I’ve enjoyed our exploration of this important subject and hate to leave it. I’m not going to take time to try and recap the whole series, but I hope if you missed one in the series or, if maybe today is the first you’ve heard about the series, that you will go to our web site, hospitalchurch.org . Under the resources tab you will find our sermon archives and there you can review the series. You can watch the video or download the audio or the manuscript and even find the take away questions for each week to again interact with this important subject.

In just a few moments after today’s short message, I’m going to be answering or attempting to answer questions members and guests have sent to us regarding this series. It’s not too late even now you can text a question about this series and if time allows I’ll try and answer it and even if we run out of time if you identify yourself with a return address I will eventually send you response to your question.

Today I want to say three things to conclude this series.

Spiritual practices are meant to be tools not rules.
Making God central trumps making him first.
Raising the proverbial “bar” for being a follower of Jesus is wrong.

Let’s jump in.

Sometimes I’ve made them and over the years I’ve heard us make judgmental statements about each other’s spirituality. Things like, “He doesn’t seem very spiritual,” and by contrast, “she’s such a spiritual person!” And this kind of thinking, these observations or judgment calls all build the illusion that our spirituality is about some destination at which we wish to arrive. We may begin, even subconsciously to think of “Being Spiritual” as a destination when the reality is that it is a

journey, and a big part of it is simply becoming more and more the person God intends for you to be—the best you.

One of our challenges is that when we are on this journey and we are involved in some practice that bumps us forward, something that seems to amp up, or accelerate our spiritual development we tend to want to turn this helpful tool we have used into a rule for everyone.

We find memorizing scripture to really push us forward in on our spiritual journey so we make a rule that every Christian must memorize x number of verses a week. Or we Pray a new way, or we read a book, or we are involved in a group, or we read the Bible through one year, and whenever we experience some practice, whenever we find a tool that makes us grow spiritually we are tempted to turn it into a rule for everyone. And sometimes the good thing that could lead to God becomes a God replacement when it slips into a rule for everyone.

In Numbers 21 we find this story of poisonous snakes biting people in Israel's camp. People were dying. Moses prayed and we find the rescue plan in vs 8 & 9

“Then the Lord told him, ‘Make a replica of a poisonous snake and attach it to the top of a pole. Those who are bitten will live if they simply look at it!’ So Moses made a snake out of bronze and attached it to the top of a pole. Whenever those who were bitten looked at the bronze snake, they recovered!”

PICTURE of bronze serpent (Leave this up until the next vs replaces it)

Simple plan, great tool, easy solution. But this God ordained tool, this symbol of the coming Christ, this thing that was to point people to God, ended up being transitioned into a kind of rule and eventually became part of turning away from God.

In 2 Kings 18: we find the young king Hezekiah cleaning up Israel's worship practices. Vs. 4 says, “He removed the pagan shrines, smashed

the sacred pillars, and knocked down the Ashera poles. He broke up the bronze serpent that Moses had made, because the people of Israel had begun to worship it by burning incense to it. The bronze serpent was called Nehushtan.”

Even good practices, God given practices can turn from tools to rules.

So here's the plan

Try lots different tools to grow spiritually. Try that book a friend said was good for them but if you are bored out of your head after the first chapter abandon it and if it speaks to you use the tool.

Try memorizing scripture.

Try all the classical spiritual disciplines They are listed on the back of today's Take Away. Experiment knowing that different times in life, different roads on your journey will call for different tools but don't make spiritual growth tools into rules for all to follow—no matter how much a certain tool helped you grow.

So first—Spiritual practices are meant to be tools not rules.

Second—Making God central trumps making him first.

For years we've quoted Matthew 6:33 to encourage us to all put God first. “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

I've preached it and I've taught it as making God your top priority. Not that it is bad to first thing every day to re-surrender our lives to God.

That if there is only one thing to “get done” today that it needs to be the God thing.

But this thinking has resulted in maybe over compartmentalizing our lives into the sacred and the secular, the God section of my daily priorities and everything else. I believe a different thinking about first

place can improve our spiritual lives. That instead of the acronym JOY = Jesus and Others and You we move to making God central to life. Instead of a list with God at the top maybe something like this.

Diagram (A circle with a smaller circle in the center labeled “God” and then in the spaces between spokes from that inner circle to the outer, are all the various issues of life, work, family, hobbies, etc.)

Here God becomes central to everything. When we are at work it is sacred time because at the center is God, and when we are at church it is sacred because God is central and so all of life. And we loose this dichotomy of sacred and secular as we are on our spiritual journey.

Paul captures this in 1 Corinthians 10:31 “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

So first—Spiritual practices are meant to be tools not rules.
 Second—Making God central trumps making him first.
 And finally— Raising the proverbial “bar” for being a follower of Jesus is wrong.

Larry Osborn writes, “A strange thing happens with most regulated professions. Over the years the bar to entry is slowly raised by those who are already in.

The excuse is always the same: A desire to keep the unqualified out and to protect the reputation of the profession. The result is a greater sense of exclusivity and often a set of rules and regulations that would keep the people raising the bar from getting in themselves if they had to start over.

You can see this same phenomena with people who flee the suburbs or the city for a more pristine rural setting. They are all for growth and easy building codes as they arrive. But once enough of their old neighbors in the city start to follow it’s not long until they are lobbying for slow or no-growth initiatives for their rural community.

The same is true in the church we've always had a tendency to raise the bar of entry –after we've gotten in.

We may think we are helping God out. Protecting the church from some unworthy adherent, but

WHENEVER THE BAR GETS RAISED HIGHER THAN THE ACTUAL STANDARD SET BY JESUS AND THE BIBLE we are misrepresenting the Gospel NO, we are in essence denying the gospel.

Our God is a come as you are God. On the first day we come to Christ to the day he comes to take us home it is his work in us not our jumping over some bar raised higher and higher by one another!

On the day of the crucifixion the temple curtain was torn from top to bottom by the unseen hand of God to throw open the holy of holies to give access to all by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the only one to clear the bar and that lowers it for all the rest of humanity and we dare not raise it.

Listen to Gods word to you

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; (no raising of the bar) rather through the law we become conscious of sin. But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. Romans 3:20-24

It is by grace you have been saved and don't you dare raise that bar on whoever is behind you on this journey.

So first—Spiritual practices are meant to be tools not rules.

Second—Making God central trumps making him first.

And finally— Raising the proverbial “bar” for being a follower of Jesus is wrong, because we all only get it by GRACE. So enjoy the spiritual journey of Grace.

