

Series: Soul Life	Reference: <i>Various Passages</i>	Title: The Interior Life - Hope	Date: 11.29.2020
<p style="text-align: center;">Website Writeup:</p> <p><i>We become our habits. Like someone suffering from heart disease, arteries don't get clogged from eating one fatty meal. They build up in minute deposits over time from all the many choices we make throughout life. Our spiritual lives get clogged when we choose other things over & above intimacy & vitality with Jesus. There's an individual & corporate call to care for our inner lives, to help our community become like Jesus! A call to commit ourselves to a daily rhythm of Morning Prayer, Scripture Reading, Frequent Prayer, Evening Prayer, and a Daily Examen which could change everything. New habits mean a new you, and new a you means a new community!</i></p>			

At the turn of every year people are reflective on their lives, giving way to moments of clear intentional self-evaluation. They sometimes create resolutions to fix negative habits. But, what if every day we dedicated ourselves to a deeper, Christ-centered life check up; a plan for ongoing, personal spiritual evaluation. Asking ourselves, and each other, "What's God doing in your Soul Life?," on a daily, weekly & yearly basis?

Through this series we're looking to dedicate ourselves anew to Christ in 4 key areas of spiritual formation. We'll be reflecting on how we can 'self-feed' as we grow in our spiritual lives. Self-feeding is a sign of spiritual maturity, revealing someone has gone through the stages of spiritual dependence. They've moved from independence where they say, "I don't need you, I can do this Jesus thing on my own." Then onto dependence where they may say, "I can't survive without your input at all, I need the church to feed me constantly." Then onto interdependence, where they say, "I'm a healthy member, both giving & receiving, in the Body of Christ. I need them, they need me, we all need Jesus."

Over the next 4 Sundays, the following 4 areas will be addressed: 1. *Your Interior Soul Life, addressing the question, "How's your soul?"* 2. *Your Family Life, addressing the question, "How's your family?"* 3. *Your active/work life, addressing the question, "How's your work?"* And 4. *Your missional life, addressing the question, "How's your calling?"*

Francis Schaeffer, in the preface to his book, *True Spirituality*, referred to a problem which he labeled as the 'problem of reality'. It came in two parts. Firstly, he observed in those who'd fought to uphold orthodox theology (right theological thinking), it didn't translate to them having a true spirituality. Secondly, although he had orthodoxy down quite well, it didn't necessarily give him true spiritual transformation - he concluded, true spirituality isn't only a matter of the mind & will, but also of the heart.

Many of us have been involved in church cultures where it's assumed the more you know, logically concludes, you're closer to God. In that culture, people value intellectualism, power & rhetoric. Cultures in which you can't afford to be wrong, and if you are, your standing diminishes. Confession goes to the wayside, given you can't show weakness, or fault. Struggles in sinful areas stay private, incubating, overtaking & eventually coming to light in some unfortunate way. And the faith community isn't

prepared to handle it, given that a true spirituality hasn't been cultivated. And it's to these churches which Paul could've asked, as he did to the Galatians, "*What happened to all your joy?*" (Galatians 4:15). Joy's a sign of deep connection to Jesus.

Cultures like I describe, and what Schaeffer saw, are seedbeds for law & legalism. So, although we want to know more *about* Jesus, we also want more *of* Jesus - to experience Him deeply, and to hear His voice directing our lives. Part of that's growing in our knowledge of Him, but the other, and equally important, is to spend intimate quiet time with Him. To see his Words come to life, applicable in our daily struggles & joys. The heart of the matter, is always a matter of the heart! Just ask yourself, are you only a master of speculation on Jesus, or are you equally overwhelmed with affection for Jesus?

Our desire is to rise to our full spiritual stature in Jesus as indicated in Ephesians 4:13, "*...until we all reach unity in the faith & in the knowledge of the Son of God & become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ.*"

We may want to grow spiritually, but often we're not sure *how*. We must understand spiritual growth isn't something which *happens* to us. Rather, spiritual growth is an intentional, daily pursuit of intimacy with Christ in all areas. We each have a part to play in how deeply, and how quickly, we become like Jesus.

Like a tree, we're always growing. How healthily we grow, however, is another matter. In a small seedling is all the DNA which will architect its rise into a majestic, living pillar of a tree. Rooting itself in the rich humus of the forest floor, that seedling's prepared to grow – but not all the ingredients for growth are found within itself. Water from the soil & the skies feed its hunger, captured by leaves & feeder roots stretching out for their supply. Minerals in the rich earth, offered by the life & death of the community of trees around it, will nurse it to full stature.

Psalms 1 tells us, we're "...like a tree" (Ps. 1:3 NIV). In other words, the water we drink & the minerals we gather all play a part in shaping our character into the likeness of Christ. Spiritual growth doesn't just *happen* – we each have a part to play in becoming like Jesus through daily habits.

For those of us who've decided following Christ is the only way to truly *be* human, how we stretch out our roots daily in prayer, study, self-care, community life, family, friendship, work & mission all have something to do with our growth. Therefore, we realize personal spiritual development is *intentional*. A series of daily choices to be like Jesus, kingdom choices – made with conviction & accountability – on which the Spirit breathes.

Hopefully the next 4 weeks will serve to strengthen each of us in our personal journey with Christ. Ignatius of Loyola said, "*I call it consolation when the soul is aroused by an interior movement which causes it to be inflamed with the love of its Creator & Lord...*"

To realize his concept of consolation means we have to ask *the questions of the heart*. When is the last time you took a moment, a deep breath, and allowed your soul, to tell you its condition?

At one point a friend of mine had chest pain, it seemed minor, but it was ongoing. He decided finally to get it checked out, and of course the doctor checked his heart. Thank God he did, given that he had major artery blockages, and had to undergo emergency surgery to clear them. My friend has never been one to worry too much about what he eats, or getting exercise before this. However, afterwards he had to introduce new habits. Old foods had to go. New foods had to be introduced. This lifestyle change was obviously put in place to strengthen & keep his physical heart in a healthy state.

The heart we're talking about isn't necessarily the physical heart beating in your chest, although caring for your physical heart may need to be part of your new spiritual regimen. For instance, at one point I lost a lot of weight, and that was not just a physical thing, but a spiritual decision. I had to come to grips that I had been living in a state of gluttony, which was depleting my physical being, which had grave effects on my spiritual state. The decision *not* to eat cheesecake was a spiritual decision for me.

In Luke 6:45 Jesus says to us, *"The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his hear his mouth speaks."*

This passage is sandwiched between all these wonderful little narratives espousing wisdom which all address this issue of the heart. Of spiritual formation & living out of intimacy with Jesus. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit. You can't pick figs from a thorn bush. Axioms describing what is real & true of the spiritual life. Being planted & rooted in Jesus means Jesus comes out through us. If we're rooted in Him, we're soaking Him up & overflowing him to others. Life then becomes purposeful, full of joy & courage, and in turn, our ministry has power & effectiveness.

The heart we speak of is actually our mind. The heart & mind, what you feel, as well as what you say & do, are all rooted in your thinking. The trinity of faculties God has blessed you with, mind, will & affections, originate from & share the same space. It's important *what* you know, but knowledge must translate to something deeper, latching itself upon the person of Jesus in living relationship. *"The heart is presented in Scripture as the very core of our being, the seat of our mind, will & emotions. However, the human heart is not portrayed in Scripture as being the same thing as the emotions..."*¹

In the physical mind, synapses are formed. Habits. Affections. Things we bend towards. And these are either healthy or unhealthy overall. We like to say at Six:Eight, *everything's spiritual*. Taking care of your heart is to take care of your mind, which will

¹ Childers, Steven: *True Spirituality; the Transforming Power of the Gospel*

lead to caring of your body & soul. It all has holistic implications as you walk through life with Jesus.

Steven Childers, in his book, *True Spirituality, the Transforming Power of the Gospel*, says there are a few traps we fall into when trying to pursue our spiritual life. Firstly, is *Intellectualism*. The intellectualist's focus is on the mind, not the heart, through a set of doctrinal beliefs you affirm with your mind. The second trap is *Passivity/Emotionalism*, marked by the motto, *let go & let God*. Those who believe they can do nothing towards their spiritual formation, and simply pursue the ecstatic experience. Thirdly, there's *Moralism*. Those who wouldn't focus on the mind or emotions, but rather on the will (think Fundamentalism: ISIS, Westboro Baptist, etc.). It's the gospel of works based righteousness, and is probably the most dangerous of the three. It's the person Paul addresses when he says in Galatians 3:3, "*Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?*" We want to avoid all three traps in our pursuit of holiness & spiritual formation.

Care For Your Soul: Proverbs 4:23 says to us, "*Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.*" Good wisdom stated in the imperative - as if there's no other choice we should be making rather than to do so. What I put into my body physically, and my mind intellectually & emotionally, all has impact on not only my life with Jesus, but my communal life & witness with all of you.

We must ask, what habits form who we are? What eating, drinking, relationship & other habits build, or break us, over time? How does this relate to our soul? What spiritual habits affect & change us? When I gain weight, I'm sluggish, tired, demotivated & less productive. It comes out in relationships, marriage, preaching, everything's affected. My habits. My own demise. It calls for change. It not enough for someone else to say to me, "Jason, you need to take care of yourself." I have to hear Jesus say it! I have to see it written in His Word, to be confronted by others walking with Him, and to hear the Holy Spirit in prayer, in order to be motivated to change. A wise man asked me, "Jason, what's Jesus calling you to give up?" I started to explore that question, and one by one my idols, big & small, materialized - habits had to be changed.

My behaving in patterns in my private life which aren't congruent of my relationship with Jesus comes out on you - although you may not be cognizant of it, or see it clearly. I wouldn't be in tune with the Spirit, and therefore, I wouldn't be giving you my best, as I'm not intimately connected with Jesus. Out of overflow we minister, and when that flow is disrupted by unhealthy patterns, people suffer, since we're only at our best when we're walking in step with the Spirit & close to Jesus.

The daily/weekly spiritual habits of embracing quiet, frequent prayer, Scripture reading, communal worship, accountable relationships & missional service recalibrate, recollect & reorient our fragmented souls. We don't know best how to live on our own, or even just from the advice of others. We need the input from our Creator, who loves & wants only what's best for us, who calls us to kingdom ministry, needs us healthy for the work,

and who has authority to direct us. Developing good spiritual habits will take us far in every aspect of our lives whatever they may be.

Care For Your Direction: In John 12 Jesus is speaking of the overflow which comes from Him & originates with the Father in Heaven, when he says in v50, *“And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I speak, therefore, I speak just as the Father has told me.”*

Have you ever started going one direction, confident in your path, only to find it led to the wrong place? I built an awesome chicken coop in my back yard. I’m not a carpenter by any means. I’m no slouch, mind you, but it’s not a usual activity for me, so at times it was fraught with a little trial & error. Especially when it came to the roof. I’d be confident I was building in the right direction, only to find a decision I’d made five steps back had resulted in a miscalculation later!

Wouldn’t it have been good to have an experienced carpenter standing there guiding me? We can be going along in life, confident we’re on the right path, but be totally off base. Or slightly askew, with an ever widening gap growing between us & Jesus over time. Like my chicken coop, one small miscalculation here, and 10 steps later my roof is an inch or more off, and things have to be dismantled to start again. Jesus is literally our guiding carpenter! In Acts, Paul was convinced he was going in the right direction when Jesus knocked him off his horse & blinded him for 3 days, redirecting Paul towards a life in Christ. Paul’s life had to be dismantled to recalibrate in the direction of Jesus.

We’re truly creatures of the heart. The root issue is desire, and desire’s strong, but it’s not always the best directive. Whichever direction our desires go, actions follow. The quality of the desires we allow to rule our hearts will end up leading us somewhere. God has a place for us to go, but our souls can get off track. Ignatius suggested our soul moves according to the events & emotions of our days. Spiritual habits create a path for us to arrive at God’s best, they keep our GPS on target amidst the events & emotions.

Care For Your Habits: Galatians 6:8 says, *“Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.”*

Cheesecake, donuts, pasta, soda & suddenly I’m 60 lb. overweight, and can’t figure out when that happened because my habits lead me away almost imperceptibly. Getting spiritually dull is like gaining weight, it happens gradually, if you ballooned up overnight you’d be disgusted with yourself, and do something asap. But weight adds here & there in minute amounts. You puff up slowly, until one day you look at a picture of yourself when you were 25, and you ask yourself, “When did I get so fat!” But these decisions are a result of the inner life, desires which we feed & to which we say yes, giving them reign in our lives.

We become our habits. Like my friend, arteries don’t get clogged from eating one fatty meal. They build up in minute deposits over time from all the many choices we make

throughout life. Our spiritual lives get clogged when we choose other things over & above intimacy & vitality with Jesus. There's a corporate call to care for our inner lives, to help our community become like Jesus! A call to commit ourselves to a daily rhythm of Morning Prayer, Scripture Reading, Frequent Prayer, Evening Prayer & a Daily Examen which could change everything. All these tools are available to all believers. New habits mean a new you. And a new you, means a new community!

Tim Keller said, there are certain warning signs to which we always need to pay close attention in our spiritual lives. Things like a weak prayer life, frequent struggles with feeling slighted by others, often being critical of other people & ministries, recurring bouts of self-pity, as well as anxiety & joylessness in both your life & work.² These things reveal we've bowed to our desires & idols in life, and not to Jesus.

Conclusion: Ask yourself, "Am I rooting my daily identity in my relationship with Jesus, or increasingly in my tasks, relationships, ministry, or vision?" As a child of God you have to possess your possessions in this present life! To own who you are in Jesus. Jesus said in Mark 1:14-15, "*The kingdom of God is at hand; repent & believe in the gospel...*" Repentance & belief are said to be the two dynamics of the spiritual combustion engine. The gospel isn't just useful for the nonbeliever to know Jesus, but also for the believer to know Jesus more fully for life! There's always a present value in the blood of Christ available to us. Repentance isn't self-flagellation, but rather a turning away from that which robs our affections towards Christ. Belief's owning what we already possess in Him.

So, let's start a journey of joyous repentance & belief in who we truly are in Jesus together over the next four weeks. We'll also end each sermon with a testimony from someone in our crowd. Today, that's Steve Munz...let me pray as he comes up.

² Keller, *Preaching the Gospel in a Post-Modern World*, 58