

Pursuing Spiritual Health

Tim Miller, Gateway Fellowship, 7/30/2017

What are the causes of spiritual health? Or what is the state of being that we call spiritual health? And what is different psychologically when a person is in a state of health?

When we're healthy, our hearts see God clearly. That sight produces corresponding emotional responses and attitudes. In health, acts of radical generosity occur. People gift a vehicle to those in need, for example. I can think of four examples off the top of my head of people here at Gateway doing that.

When we're healthy, our prayers are offered with confidence that God hears and answers prayers, and that praying is intensely practical and powerful, not just words or a spiritual exercise.

When we're healthy there is increased social activity toward the things of God and the pursuit of the kingdom also naturally happen in a state of spiritual health.

When we're healthy, we obey the Lord's promptings quickly.

But circumstantially, nothing is different in healthy times than in normal life.

Things keep going wrong. People keep going wrong. Life is still the mix of ugly and beauty it normally is. The only difference is that things that are always true are held as more precious than they usually are. Health is just normal life in the kingdom of God. But we come up with terms like "revival" to talk about it.

The difference between an overcoming believer and a weary, worn out, despairing one is not typically circumstances. Joy instead of despair is usually not a matter of what is true or isn't true. It's a matter of focus and perspective. What truth are we allowing to grow big in our perspective?

The imperative is arranging our life in such a way that we are experiencing enduring hope, joy, and peace in Jesus. That's really the issue. You can come to me and say, "How do I fix my marriage, my kids, my church, my employer..." Typically, there are many books on strategies and principles, and I'm fine with that. Those books are probably all very true. But as a disciple of Jesus, I'm convinced that Jesus is the expert

on life. And my shortcut to brilliance is to arrange my life in such a way that I'm experiencing enduring hope, joy, and peace in Him.

What we call "revival," is usually the result of people arranging their schedules in such a way to come back to that experience, which was always available, and always true. **But what we're after is something deeper than seasonal showers.** We're after the Psalm 1 blessing. The tree that is deeply rooted and bears fruit in and out of season, and whose leaves never wither.

Human emotions are typically caused by underlying beliefs. If you believe everything is going to be amazing today, your emotions will reflect that. If you believe everything is going wrong and your life will get worse and worse and everyone will betray you, your emotions will reflect that as well. And because humans are capable of complex beliefs, we are also capable of complex emotions. We can be happy about some things, sad about others, at peace with some things, and simultaneously worried about others. But I am saying that feelings are supervenient upon beliefs as their generative counterparts.

Scripture uses the word "magnify." Come magnify the Lord with me (Psalm 34:3). When we use that word normally we think of a magnifying glass. We use a magnifying glass to make something that's too small to see with the human eye bigger, so we can see it better. Lately, I've taken an interest in macro photography, which is basically pictures of small things up close so we can see jumping spider's beautiful eyes, for example. Glorious little creatures. But when Scripture invites us to magnify the Lord it isn't saying, "Make him look bigger than he is." We use microscopes to magnify something small. But we use telescopes to bring something far closer. It may be huge, like Jupiter (11x the size of earth), but from our perspective it looks tiny.

In revival we magnify the Lord, and what is actually huge but looks small because of our perspective, begins to look more like it really is. The closer our perspective aligns to what it really is, the more we begin to move in health.

The more we see like Jesus, the more we look like Jesus. We always bear the fruit of what we're rooted in.

The ebb and flow of the christian spiritual vitality has less to do with the spiritual climate of the congregation, or the community, and more to do with the internal state of the believer. The perspective that has been cultivated will either magnify the Lord or

something else. Something will dominate our understanding. Something will captivate our hearts. Something will occupy our minds.

To be holy, we must set ourselves to be whole. The greatest commandment that Jesus highlighted is not merely a statement of the degree of passion for the Lord that is right. Heart, soul, mind, strength. The one denoting passion here is strength. But there are three other arenas that must come into alignment with the love of God. This commandment is rich and pregnant with depth. I want to highlight simply that it takes for granted that we humans are made up of parts, and that all our parts must be operational and lined up toward God if we are to be holy. Again, to be holy we also need to be whole. Often, devotion is not the weak link, but a divided heart or a soul crushed by grief, or a mind that is unrenewed by truth are the weak link that trips us up.

Last week I made a case that we hurt enough and realize we need to change, learn enough that we believe change is possible, but it isn't until we receive enough that we change. And as I continued to reflect on that reality I was made aware that the disconnect from receiving comes from parts of the self which are not themselves whole. Make the parts whole, and make the person whole. And due to certain relational events, I've become convinced that the only way to get there is together.

When we say the words, "church discipline," we usually think of the very last stage of a failed restoration process - excommunication. But the word discipline is the same root as the word disciple. A disciple of Jesus is someone who is learning from Jesus how to walk God's paths. A disciple is being disciplined, or trained, by Jesus' words. The predominant point of why there is a gathered community is largely a context facilitating God's intention of forming us into the image of his Son. In other words, the point of church gatherings is that we're all in a process of church discipline. We don't think of it that way, but that's true.

There are two forms of church discipline - formative and restorative. Formative discipline means we're being formed by the serving, singing, praying, preaching, friendships etc. We're formed by living transparently as a family. More and more, I am convinced that church should be messy, not because grace is a license to sin - it isn't. Grace is the power to change. But church should be messy because grace can't empower change for issues that we keep hidden. That's why church should be messy. A core value of Gateway is vulnerability and transparency. I don't mean everybody must know everything. But that's fine if they do.

Typically people advertise their virtues and hide their flaws. Jesus, in the sermon on the mount, tells us to hide our virtues and confess our sins. It's an interesting method of killing the play-actor and the love of reputation that infects most of us. Fascinating medicine. Jesus warned his disciples over and over about the danger of becoming like the religious leaders of his day, who he called "hypocrites." That is just a big word that means play-actors. They are acting a part that isn't really them. Acting loving even though they are positioning for their own gain. Acting prayerful when they are actually seeking their will to be done on earth. Acting generous in order to be thought of as generous and admired by others. Acting knowledgeable about God and the afterlife and right and wrong because knowledge is power and eloquence is prestigious and the combination of those is influence and affirmation. The love of God is the stated mission. The search for significance is the actual mission.

This is pretty normal stuff, in terms of human motivations. The amount of self-centered ego thinking most of us do in a day would be pretty disappointing if we were fully aware of the extent of it. Thankfully, God typically doesn't transform us by showing us the full extent of our sin and saying, "hey quit it," as much as the much less traumatic process of friendship and faith where our aim changes as we gradually fall in love with something greater in order, which necessarily displaces the lesser things we've been seeking instead.

No one CAN serve God and money. That's a very different statement that no one SHOULD serve God and money. No one should would be a rule. No one can is just stating a fact about how human hearts work. It can't be done. No one can do it. One of them wins every time. Never both.

Restorative discipline is what should happen if we reject the formative process. Someone should love us enough to gently correct, rebuke, plead or exhort us back to the place of being formed again.

Matthew 18 Parable of the Lost Sheep

12 "If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them wanders away, what will he do? Won't he leave the ninety-nine others on the hills and go out to search for the one that is lost? **13** And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he will rejoice over it more than over the ninety-nine that didn't wander away! **14** In the same way, it is not my heavenly Father's will that even one of these little ones should perish.

Correcting Another Believer

15 “If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back. **16** But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses. **17** If the person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. Then if he or she won’t accept the church’s decision, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector.

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1 Cor 5:11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.

Parable of the Unforgiving Debtor

21 Then Peter came to him and asked, “Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?”

22 “No, not seven times,” Jesus replied, “but seventy times seven!”