

Today we return to our series, “Signposts of Hope in a Suffering World,” and we are going to look at the topic of “Spirituality.”

“Spirituality” is a slippery term and difficult to define.¹ It could refer to

- the human non-material soul,
- inner states or dispositions,
- religious devotion or piety,
- spiritual disciplines like prayers, fasting, meditation, etc.
- the spark of divine in human.

Generally speaking, ***“spirituality” refers to human connection and interaction with the transcendence, the divine, or the spirit world.***²

Anthropologists have consistently observed that human beings are incurably spiritual and conscious of the idea of God.

¹ Bernard McGinn has identified 35 different definitions of “spirituality” in his essay, “The Letter and the Spirit: Spirituality as a Academic Discipline. Cf.

<https://www.lillyfellows.org/media/1377/bernard-mcginn-1992.pdf>

² Cf. James Emery White, *Christianity for People Who Aren't Christians* (p. 37). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

<https://owlcation.com/humanities/Why-is-Belief-in-God-So-Universal-and-Persistent>

³ <https://qz.com/1292368/columbia-and-yale-scientists-just-found-the-spiritual-part-of-our-brains/>

In 2018 Yale and Columbia scientists found the spiritual part of the human brain which they called the neurobiological home of spirituality.³

This deep yearning and thirst for connecting with the transcendence or the spirit world is reflected in bookstores under categories such as “Spirituality,” “Mind, Body, Soul,” “Religions,” “Self-Help,” “Discover Personality Type,” “Reincarnation,” “Mysticism,” “Yoga and Meditation Practices,” etc.⁴

But all these are really nothing new: we learn that humankind is made in the image of God from the creation story in Gen. 1-2. ***There is an in-born desire and ability for every person to relate beyond self, to others, to the whole cosmos, and ultimately to God.***

Moreover, the wise king, Solomon, has written long time ago that God the Creator has planted eternity in the human heart.⁵

⁴ N.T. Wright suggests that it is “the hidden spring that bubbles up within human hearts and human societies ... as a signpost pointing away from the bleak landscape of modern secularism and toward the possibility that we humans are made for more than this.” (*Simply Christian*, pp. 18, 20.)

⁵ Eccles. 3:11. Blaise Pascal, the great 17th century philosopher and mathematician, describes this as the “God-shaped hole” in every human being (cf. *Pensées* VII). Canadian missionary and popular author Don Richardson in his book *Eternity in Their Hearts* (1981), relates many fascinating stories of how different peoples and

From the perspective of the Gospel of John,⁶ there's no doubt that "the [eternal] Word became human and made his home among us" (Jn. 1:14) defines the essence of biblical spirituality:

Jesus is the crux of any human connection with God and experience of His presence.

- ***He is the way that leads to God,***
- ***the truth that defines the character of God,***
- ***and the life that magnifies the love of God.***

- Jesus makes the Invisible God visible.

Jn. 3:17 God sent his Son into **the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.**

It is instructive to learn that John's use of the word "**world**" [*cosmos*] underlines the darkness of evil and the human heart dominated by

- false loves,

cultures have a tradition of worshipping one true deity whom they believed to be eternal, all-powerful, perfect and unsearchable. God has indeed put "eternity in their hearts".

⁶ "Either the gods are largely absent (Epicureanism); they are somehow divine forces within us and the world (Stoicism); they live in a nonphysical and nontemporal world to which our souls can escape (Platonism); or they are particular forces operating in different areas of life (ordinary paganism). John, however, lived in the Jewish world, which was as radically different then as it is radically different

- false values,

- and false knowledge

The world "***acts contrary to God's will, the world attacks God's people and concerns, and the world attracts God's people away from God's heart.***"⁷

In "tenting in our midst" ...

- God takes **initiative** to enter into the world of darkness and human experience.
- He sends a personal and tangible **invite** to humankind for life transformation.⁸

Spirituality is Jesus-centered, an all-encompassing life transforming journey with the Word-made-flesh through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.⁹

now. For Jews, the One God of creation was utterly different from the world, and yet intimately involved with it. [Wright, N. T.. *Broken Signposts* (p. 66). HarperOne. Kindle Edition.]

⁷ Evan B. Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, Chapter 6: The Divine-Human Relationship, p. 164; see esp. Figure 5.2, The threats of the "World" on p. 167.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Chapter 6: The Divine-Human Relationship, pp. 195-225.

⁹ Cf. 1:1-14; 3:5-8; 7:38-39; 14:15-17; 15:26-27; 16:5-15.

Now I am going to share with you a framework of Spirituality in John's Gospel:

The Three Dynamics of Spirituality



Our human connection with God-reality and God-presence is ***not static, ritualistic or procedural but dynamic, relational and interactive connection between God and Christ-followers.***

It is an **all-of-life spirituality** that is expressed in every component of life, moment by moment, rather than segregated to sacred rituals, devotional practices or regular participation in religious events like annual festive celebrations, weekly Sunday worship, or small group gatherings.

Let get straight to the first dynamics of spirituality:

Pursue Spiritual Renewal



^{3:3} Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are ***born again***, you cannot see the Kingdom of God."

⁴ "What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. "How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be ***born again***?" ⁵ Jesus replied, "I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without ***being born of water and the Spirit***." ⁶ Humans can reproduce only human life, but ***the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life.***"

In this conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, we see clearly this:

One's initial connection with God and the developing experience of His powerful presence is dependent upon being born from above.¹⁰

Caused by the desire to replace God and put self on the throne as well as our human bent toward self-serving behaviours egged on by forces of darkness, the individual's **spiritual renewal** and its **ongoing transformation** from the inside out can be done only through ***the heart-renovating, soul-purifying, life procreating work of the Holy Spirit***, thus requiring a supernatural work in the innermost part of every individual.¹¹

Jn. 4:24 For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship ***in spirit and in truth***.

Further in John 7:37–39 Jesus promises that the Spirit would **flow from within** every believer like a rushing river, **quenching our deep, inner thirst**.¹²

And in His farewell discourse in Jn. 14-17 Jesus describes the Spirit as the advocate, the One who

comes alongside, reveals/teaches truth, counsels, convicts sin, and nurtures our relationship with God.

In May, 2020, shortly after the beginning of the pandemic, Tameka Kee wrote an article, "From iPhones to iGod: The Rise of Digital Spirituality," with these concluding words:

"Driven by our increasingly connected and typically mobile lifestyles, the trend of finding faith and connection to God, the Goddess, or another higher power through technology shows no signs of stopping."¹³

In light of the numerous varieties of non-Christian and Christian spirituality offered to many spiritual seekers, sinners, and saints alike,¹⁴ ***the Holy Spirit is Jesus' helping presence who lives in the hearts of individual Christ-followers, gives spiritual discernment, and leads us in the Jesus way throughout our ongoing relationship with God***.¹⁵

¹⁰ Cf. 1:12 - not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God. Being born of the water and spirit refers to the renewing and purifying work of God's Spirit as prophesized in Eze. 36:25-27; Is. 44:3.

¹¹ "... part of the Christian story ... is that human beings have been so seriously damaged by evil that what they need isn't simply better social conditions, but help, and indeed, rescue, from outside themselves." (N.T. Wright, *Simply Christian*, p. 25.)

¹² Randy Rheume, *God the Son: What John's Portrait of Jesus Means and Why it Matters* (p. 182). Wipf & Stock. Kindle Edition.

¹³ <https://www.shondaland.com/live/technology/a32417473/from-iphones-to-igod-the-rise-of-digital-spirituality/>

¹⁴ See, for example, <https://www.happierhuman.com/types-spirituality/>

¹⁵ See Jn. 4:13-24, 24; 7:38-39; 14:15-17; 15:26-27; 16:5-15; 20:22. The Spirit is "a Jesus-like divine person on a mission to carry on Jesus' work after his physical

This takes us to the second dynamics of spirituality:

Regulate Soul Care



Jn. 15:4 **Remain** in me, and I will **remain** in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you **remain** in me.⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who **remain** in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing ...
¹⁰When you obey my commandments, you **remain**

departure.” [Randy Rheaume, *God the Son: What John’s Portrait of Jesus Means and Why it Matters* (p. 183). Wipf & Stock. Kindle Edition.]

“The presence of Jesus and the power of the Spirit confirm that to be human was and is a good thing; being creatures of space, time, and matter was and is good; and that the powerful, rescuing, healing, transforming love of God is renewing the whole world, and ourselves with it.” (N.T. Wright, *Broken Signposts*, pp. 82-83.

in my love, just as I obey my Father’s commandments and **remain** in his love.

According to N.T. Wright, here is John’s most vivid expression of the relationship between Jesus and his followers.¹⁶

“Remain in me” (10x in vv. 4-11) – means **being in a shared space** with Jesus, having a **24/7, 360 life-giving connection** with Him:

Make oneself at home with Jesus;

Being one’s self, vulnerable, and transparent;

Soak in the warmth of Jesus’ presence;

Receive instruction and inspiration.

Jesus is summoning His followers to developing a **healthy rhythm and wholesome habit of being in tune and in touch** so to **rest, revitalize, and recalibrate** our souls for alignment with God’s will and fruitful living.¹⁷

HarperOne. Kindle Edition.) See also Duvall, J. Scott; Hays, J. Daniel. *God’s Relational Presence*, pp. 287-288. Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

¹⁶ The “vine” is a biblical image for God’s people in OT; Jesus is applying the same imagery to Himself and the relationship with His followers – He is the true vine by whom God fulfills His promises and works out His restoring purpose. See Is. 5:1-16; Eze. 15:6-8.

¹⁷ N.T. Wright, *Broken Signposts*, p. 72. HarperOne. Kindle Edition.

Jesus' point about bearing fruit is a good lead to the third dynamics of spirituality:

Engage in Mission



While biblical spirituality is a personal, relational, and interactive connection with God, but it is **never intended just for private consumption, convenience, comforts, or contentment!**

Jn. 20:21 Again he said, “Peace be with you. **As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.**”²² Then he **breathed on them** and said, “**Receive the Holy Spirit.**”

¹⁸ “Often in the OT, Yahweh’s rûah is said to come upon someone to empower the person to perform an office or task requiring supernatural ability.²⁸¹ Thus the Holy Spirit is God’s personal and powerful presence which is conscious and active

Just like the Creator breathed His Spirit into our first parents, enabling them with His life force, creative power and entrusted them with a kingly vocation as image-bearers (cf. Gen. 1-2),¹⁸ Jesus breathed the Spirit on the disciples and send them out as life-giving, love-embodying, and self-sacrificing conduits of peace!

In the same way today, the peace we received from Jesus transforms us into Spirit-enabled, active participants in a lifelong shalom-making mission that is modelled after Christ’s “tenting” in the world, to live the full life of devotion in and for the whole world.

Spirituality is not for cloistered serenity, self-actualization, or personal success.

Vibrant spirituality is engaging in a God-entrusted and self-giving mission.

We are commissioned by Jesus to get out of our cozy settings - throwing away our security blankets, denying our selfish desires and indulgences - to go

everywhere in creation, especially in people chosen to serve him through supernatural deeds.” [Rheume, Randy. God the Son: What John’s Portrait of Jesus Means and Why it Matters (p. 173). Wipf & Stock. Kindle Edition.]

and comfort people who are needy and hurting, even in an environment hostile to God.

The harvest is plentiful because spirituality is in, whether we are working in the corporate sector, or with profit or non-profit social agencies, or education, or public/private health, or children, youth, and families!¹⁹

- “Divinity consultants” are hired by corporations to design sacred rituals for their spiritually depleted employees.
- Beliefs in paranormal phenomena are higher in young people; millennials under tremendous stress and anxiety are turning to New Age practices such as astrology, tarot, sound baths, Reiki, in place of traditional religions.
- “Nones” – those who consider themselves having no religion – show a spiritual curiosity.

- “Dones” – those who are disillusioned by organized religions but in search spiritual anchor.

By the power of the Spirit we can be freed from our selfish whims and wishes, our constant craving for comforts and convenience, and our insatiable lust for pleasure and power so we can fulfill our God-intended purposes of being like Christ and loving others.

We are spiritually renewed and recalibrated for a mission, patterned after the mission of Jesus!

Let me close by suggesting a couple of practical takeaways:

1. In a crowd this size, in-person and online, some of you are feeling “spiritually stuck.” You need spiritual renewal and let the Holy Spirit infuse you with power and discernment so you can get on track on the discipleship pathway. Now is the time for you to prayerfully take Cornerstone’s Discipleship Pathway Assessment

¹⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/28/business/remote-work-spiritual-consultants.html>
<https://amp.wbur.org/hereandnow/2020/01/13/spirituality-krista-tippett>

<https://www.shondaland.com/live/technology/a32417473/from-iphones-to-igod-the-rise-of-digital-spirituality/>

[\(https://cornerstonechurch.ca/discipleshippathway/\)](https://cornerstonechurch.ca/discipleshippathway/).

If you are involved in a small group, maybe you could suggest to the whole group to take the assessment and share the result with each other for mutual support.

2. Engaging in mission is an opportunity to experience the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. As we plan to start a second service, join our team to engage in mission.

https://cornerstonechurch.ca/serve/?utm_source=Cornerstone+Community&utm_campaign=a1fdedca48-2021-10-12+E-News&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_b8ed07a29c-a1fdedca48-295232037