

When I Struggle Spiritually...

About thirty years ago, when I was just beginning to preach the gospel on a regular basis, Dad gave me an important piece of advice with regard to subject selection. He simply said, “Preach what you need to hear.” This has been valuable guidance to me over the years, and brethren have thus often had to perhaps *suffer through* what I needed to hear. This lesson is born out of these things.

Sometimes, identifying a problem also necessarily prescribes the solution. For instance, if a lack of potassium in the body is discovered to be the cause of problematic symptoms, then the remedy is simply adding potassium to the diet, or supplementing the diet with an additional dose of it.

What if the “problematic symptoms” indicate that we’re struggling spiritually- like when we just don’t feel right (usually don’t feel close to God), but really can’t put our finger on exactly what is wrong? We realize we’re not “where we ought/want to be” in our relationship with God, but we really don’t know why or how to fix it. Have you ever been there? Or perhaps, are you there now?

While each person is certainly different with regards to their *spiritual diet* and *exercise* requirements, and I don’t presume to speak for you individually, let me share with you some things I’ve learned over the years that are the “usual suspects” for me when I struggle spiritually. And, as previously indicated, in these cases, identifying the deficiency obviously prescribes the solution.

I. When I Struggle Spiritually, It’s Usually Because:

A. I’m not *praying* like I should.

This, in turn, is most often because:

1. I know there is sin in my life of which I am not repenting.

2. I know God doesn’t want to listen to my prayers when I’ve hardened my heart against Him, 1Pet.3:12; unless I’m confessing and asking forgiveness, cf. 1John 1:9-10. So, while I’m still “enjoying my sin”....
3. I stop praying- thus cutting off communication with Him.

So, I become like the child who hides or makes himself scarce when he knows he’s done wrong and will have to admit it, correct it, and “face the music” because of it, cf. Gen.3:8ff.

It’s hard to “feel close” to someone with whom you don’t regularly and deeply communicate! That intimate and consistent conversation is vital to spiritual well-being, and to feeling spiritually healthy, cf. Matt.6:6-7; 1Thess.5:17.

B. I’m not *reading/studying* like I should.

“Communication” is a two-way exchange of ideas and information. If I have stopped praying to God, I’m no longer communicating with Him. But, if I stop reading and studying His Word, then I’m not allowing Him to communicate with me, 2Pet.1:3 → 2Tim.3:16-17 → 2Tim.3:14-15 → 2Tim.2:15 → Acts 17:11.

Several of you are constantly asking me bible questions because you are reading and studying your Bibles and wanting to learn more. Question: Do you feel closer to God and spiritually stronger when you are regularly reading and studying God’s Word? Well of course you do! You’re allowing God to communicate with you!

Incidentally, if we cut ourselves off from God’s Word, and thus cut off that access to communication He has with us, then He might resort to providentially “thumping us on the head” with events in our lives to get our

attention. Read and study your Bible to grow spiritually and to feel (and be) closer to God.

C. I'm not *eating* like I should.

This point is not a rehash of "*longing for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow...*" (1Pet.2:2). Instead, I'm talking about the Lord's Supper. Consider carefully 1Cor.11:20-22 → 27-30. For the Corinthians, the Lord's Supper had lost its proper purpose because they were:

1. Doing it wrong, vv.21,33-34; and
2. Doing it for the wrong reason, vv.27-29.
3. Therefore, its proper purpose and effect of drawing us into close communion with God was not only thwarted, it was perverted!

I/we don't have to turn the Lord's Supper into a drunken feast to miss its benefits. I/we just have to "go through the proper *motions*" without the proper *emotions* that come from careful contemplation and appreciation of what God and Christ did for my/our sins, vv.23-26.

D. I'm not *exercising* like I should.

We feel better *physically* when we're lean, strong, and flexible. The same is true *spiritually*. If I pay attention to my *spiritual* body, I can tell when I'm getting spiritually *fat*, *weak*, and *stiff*. It is then that I feel myself getting spiritually lazy and "out of shape." As was the case in the other three areas, identifying the problem makes the solution axiomatic. If I'm getting spiritually:

1. Fat, then I need cut down on the spiritual sweet *desserts* and start adding more *lean protein* to my diet, Heb.5:14. A constant diet of the *spiritual* sweets of God's love, grace, and blessing of us without the balance of the *meat/protein* of what He expects and requires of us will make us spiritually "fat and lazy"!

2. Weak, then perhaps I need to cut back on abusing my spiritual body with guilt, shame, and failure by recognizing God's love, grace, sacrifice, and provision for me, Rom.7:18-24 → 7:25 – 8:1-2,14-15,16-17.
3. Stiff (unable to bend and move as I should) and "set in my ways", then I need to be reminded that life is not all about me and my wants, needs, and desires, Phil.2:3-4 → v.5ff. Otherwise, I will not be as conscientiously *flexible* as I should be with regards to other's needs, wants, and desires- and therefore won't expend any real energy (that's *exercise*) to help meet them, cf. Rom.14; 15:1-2; Heb.12:12-16.

II. Conclusions

When I'm struggling spiritually, it's usually because I'm not:

- A. Communicating with God *in prayer* as I should;
- B. Allowing God to communicate with me *by reading and studying* His word;
- C. Properly communing with God *in my eating* of the Lord's Supper; and/or
- D. *Exercising* my faith to prevent becoming fat, lazy, weak, and rigid.

When you struggle spiritually, is it for any/all of the same reasons?

Are you struggling spiritually right now? Do you now know not only *why*, but also *how* to correct it?

And just as importantly, *will* you now correct it so that you can be spiritually healthy, strong, and active in the Lord's service and in your relationship with Him?