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PASSIONATE SPIRITUALITY

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~ Scripture: Romans 8:5-9a ~

SCRIPTURE

⁵Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who **live in accordance with the Spirit** have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶The mind set on the flesh is death, but the **mind controlled by the Spirit** is life and peace; ⁷the mind set on the flesh is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. ⁹You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if **the Spirit of God lives in you.**

INTRODUCTION

If you've been following the train of thought in our recent sermons, you might have noticed that we've been talking about the things the Bible says make for a HEALTHY CHURCH:

1. Empowering Leadership == more & more individuals becoming equipped, supported, motivated, and mentored to become all God wants to become.
2. Gift-Oriented Ministry == more & more members identifying their gifts and finding places of service within & beyond the church. When you live out your spiritual gifted-ness, you are no longer working in your own strength; the Holy Spirit is working in you.
3. Inspiring Worship Services == people being moved, inspired, touched; we don't gather just because it's "routine" or fulfilling a "Christian duty".
4. Passionate Spirituality** == faith lived out with commitment, fire and enthusiasm. A Christ-centered spirituality can never be separated from the way we live day-to-day in the real world. In fact, **a person who is truly spiritual understands that his professed love for God is meaningless unless it finds expression in the world with a transformed heart that brings about godly actions.**

I want to talk about spirituality this morning—what it is, what it isn't, how it is lived out in the real world.

A. What is SPIRITUALITY? It is associated with many things, including:

- Crystal gazers, Hollywood Scientologists, new age gurus;
- Mysticism, TM, a feeling of at-one-ness with self (or the universe), asceticism (extreme deprivation).
- Wild outward expressions (e.g.: running the aisles, being "slain" in the Spirit, speaking in tongues).
- In Biblical times, it had to do with whether or not one ate certain meats, whether or not one was circumcised.

Taking our cue from Paul's words in **ROMANS 8**, spirituality is:

- Living in accordance (in tune) with the Spirit (the Holy Spirit) [v. 5a]
That's different from "positive thinking". . .from being in tune with "my inner self" / "the universe" (which is nebulous & impersonal); this is personal.
- Having our minds set (our wills determined) to do what the Holy Spirit desires. [v. 5b]

- The main thing is pleasing God (i.e.: living for God rather than self).
- Having our minds (e.g.: thoughts, emotions, actions. . .everything about us) controlled by the Holy Spirit. [v. 6]
- Literally having God the Holy Spirit live within you. [v. 9]

The Holy Spirit is our source & supply for living:

- If we live “*by the flesh*”, we are living unto self. . . bent on having our own needs & wants fulfilled. . . self-assured (“I don’t need a Higher Power”). Likely to come up short.
- Living “*by the Spirit*” means living dependent on God, trusting God. . . no matter what the real world throws at us!

I find it interesting how easy it is to write God out of the picture of our lives—no matter what the circumstances (positive or negative).

If the real world throws some blessings (e.g.: good job / nice home / loving family / good health / financial well-being / etc.), do we recognize and praise God as the giver of every good gift? Do we remember that our lives are not sustained by the good circumstances, but by God? That we depend on Him for the air we breathe? That we live, move, and have our being in Him?

If the real world throws us a curve ball (e.g.: no job / poor health / financial stress / chronic illness / sorrow / suffering / lots of loss), it is easy to ask where God is. Maybe He is MIA, we think. Maybe He is punishing us. Maybe He is powerless to fix all that’s wrong with our lives. Maybe He just doesn’t care? But truth is, we STILL live our lives dependent on God as our source & supply. When we live by the Spirit, we will begin to see God’s presence at all the places of our lives. The **Psalmist** understood this aspect and wrote in a prayer: “*When I climb to the highest mountains, YOU are there, O LORD. When I descend into the pits of hell, YOU are there also!*”

Like Paul in **Philippians 4:12f** – “*I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. . . I’ve been well fed and I’ve gone hungry. Whether living in plenty or in want, I can do it, because I do it through Him who gives me strength.*”

The reality is that the real world is filled with the GOOD, the BAD, and the UGLY. There are BLESSINGS and there are CATASTROPHES. If you live long enough, you’ll experience a bit of it all. Some will experience more NEGATIVE than POSITIVE. I don’t know why; life is not always fair.

But what I do know is that the path to victorious, fulfilled living is NOT to allow the circumstances to determine how we live. . . BUT to allow our relationship with God to determine how we live. That’s living by the Spirit. That’s Christ-centered spirituality.

B. Now, there’s SPIRITUALITY. . . and then there’s PASSIONATE SPIRITUALITY.

People are leery of those who appear to go too hard after God. They call them radicals, fanatics. You know what the definition of a *fanatic* is? Anybody who loves Jesus more than you do! 😊

People who are passionately spiritual go hard after the things of God. Their relationship with the Lord goes to the core of their being; it becomes the very defining quality of their lives. Their spirituality is not an interest, activity, or leisure pursuit (out of a fascination or curiosity). It is the driving force, the sustaining factor, the energizing principle of their lives.

ILLUSRATION> When I began to play **water polo** years ago, first I had to overcome my fear. Next I became interested, even fascinated. Then it got in my blood, and I started arranging my schedule around it. You can usually tell what we are passionate about by the way we handle our CALENDAR (time) and our WALLET (money).

SO, how do we become a people (as individuals & as a church) deep in the things of God?

How do we move FROM a lifestyle that is controlled by the flesh (i.e.: self-centered, self-driven, self-righteous. . .that says “I’ll make it on my own, thank-you”).....TO a life that is centered in Him, where the most important thing in my life is pleasing Him?

Couple things.....

I. BEGINS WITH SURRENDER

We don’t grunt our way into the life of the Spirit with fists clenched and nostrils flaring. We don’t batter down the doors of the spirit-world. We simply open ourselves—whomever and whatever we may be—and welcome the Holy Spirit in.

We pray (as we often sing): *Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Melt me. Mold me. Fill me. Use me.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.*

Surrender what? My will. Much in life doesn’t go as we plan or want.
The struggle. . . *“the fightings and fears within, without”*.

STEP 3 in AA says: *“Made a conscious decision to turn our life & will over to the care of God”*
 WILL = the things I can control
 LIFE = the things I can’t control / the things that happen to me

These are daily choices—sometimes momentary—that allow the Holy Spirit to master our sinful nature so that we are filled with the character of Jesus Christ. Often that process is part of some difficult or painful circumstances.

Let me give you an IMAGE to work with. Think of two circles overlapping: ONE is my life story; the OTHER is God’s story. Spirituality is merging the two stories. The more overlap, the better. If there’s more of God’s story superimposed over mine, that comes about by surrender.

II. SUSTAINED BY DISCIPLINE

Genuine spirituality is a partnership. We cannot become passionately spiritual by ourselves. Nor will God make us spiritual through some magical process apart from our cooperation. So there’s work involved. That where *“spiritual disciplines”* come in.

Sounds hard, doesn’t it? I don’t want to hear about the work involved, just the benefits. But if you’ll look in Webster’s, you’ll find *DISCIPLINE* is *“any activity engaged in by intentional effort that will help a person do what they could not otherwise do.”*

ILLUSTRATION> No way the five of us could have done the 300 mile ride without a regimen of training, (almost) daily exercise, and diet.

That’s what spiritual discipline is. It is training that will help me depend more on the Holy Spirit, less on self (the flesh). That’s the purpose of spiritual disciplines like *MEDITATION. . . REFLECTION. . . BIBLE STUDY. . . CONFESSION. . . SIMPLICITY. . . FASTING. . . PRAYER.*¹

- PRAYER says: *“Lord, I can’t make it on my own. I need you.”*
- FASTING says: *“I am trusting You to be my nourishment and strength.”*
- SIMPLICITY says: *“I am determined to be less encumbered with the things of this world.”*
- STUDY says: *“I don’t have all the answers / wisdom. I need God’s Word.”*
- GIVING says: *“I don’t find my security in my possessions. I find my security in God.”*

¹ If you would like to check yourself against these spiritual disciplines, this would be a good page to print out.

These are the “stuff” of Christlike living.

The aim of all this is to get my mind set on what the Spirit desires, not what my flesh desires. It is to put me under the control of the Holy Spirit rather than my sinful nature → which is what will ultimately please God.

Sound hard? It is! [IRONY: When Holy Spirit is in control, it really isn't!]
Sound contrary to human nature? It is!

Truth is, apart from God, life can get pretty ugly. . .and the world can become a place where none of us want to live. There are two ways to live in this world. The Apostle Paul contrasts them in **Galatians 5** [MSG]:

¹⁹⁻²¹It is obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time: repetitive, loveless, sex; an accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness; trinket gods; magic-show religion; cut-throat competition; all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants; brutal temper and rage; an impotence to love or be loved; divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits; the vicious habit of depersonalizing people; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions. I could go on.

²²⁻²³But what happens when we live God's way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard—things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic *sanctity* permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely.

¹⁶⁻¹⁸My counsel is this: Live freely, animated and motivated—*passionately*—by God's Spirit.

CONCLUSION

Maybe there's a message in this for you! Maybe you've been living a life dominated by natural desires (legitimate, but nonetheless "natural"). Maybe you've been living for today, for self.

God doesn't want just a part of your life (e.g.: 1-2 hours on Sunday). God wants your entire life. Spirituality is a matter of living every moment for God.

Maybe you've pulled away from God. Things are good, and you've been living by your own strength / resources. Or, things are bad, and you're so discouraged you're not trying at all. One way or the other, you've pulled the circles apart. Isn't it time to put them back together?

Surrender! That's right, surrender! Embrace the cross of Christ and let God bring about the death of your sinful nature so that He can release the life of His Spirit in you.

~AMEN~