

# Spirituality

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Today I want to talk to you about spirituality. According to Scripture, there are two kinds of men (and women); there are those who are carnal – that is, given to a life of satisfying the desires of their flesh, and those who are spiritual – those who are willing to crucify their flesh in order to serve God. Crucifying the flesh means dying to self – setting aside self-will so that God’s will can be done. Knowing what that entails is the mark of a disciplined man; striving to do it, however, is the mark of a disciple.

Romans 8:5-8 says it this way:

*“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”*

So there are carnal men and spiritual men, and they are opposites. 1 Corinthians 2:14-16 tells us more but uses the term “natural man;” it says:

*“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For “who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?” But we have the mind of Messiah.”*

So carnal men and natural men are one and the same. When God created man, He did not desire that natural man’s nature should be carnal, and it wasn’t carnal until Adam sinned. For that reason, the concept of “spirituality” would have had no meaning before the fall, because the opposite of it – carnality – did not yet exist because man had not yet been tested. Adam could experience temptation, but did not become carnal until he gave in to it.

But that’s history for us, because Adam did sin, and its consequence is that we are in a fallen world; and we suffer being part of the fallenness of the world, even those of us who, by virtue of being believers in Yeshua, have been given a new spirit.

*“Therefore if any man be in Messiah, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” (2 Corinthians 5:17)*

Our new new spirit gives us a renewed nature that causes us to not want to sin against God, but it wars against a part of our old nature that we call “flesh,” and in a way we have the same choices to make as Adam did – to either obey God or sin – and how spiritual we are may be measured by how often our spirit prevails over our flesh. Through Yeshua and the Holy Spirit, God has given us the power to prevail, but it is still our choice, as we see in Ephesians 4:20-24:

*“But you have not so learned Messiah, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Yeshua: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.”*

When we talk about spirituality, of course we mean “biblical” spirituality. You know the word has a very broad meaning and in today’s world it is often applied to spirits and gods other than the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. As we have seen, the Bible encourages us to be “spiritual” men, so let’s now ask ourselves: “What is biblical spirituality, and what does it look like?” I believe the most minimal form of it is our believing enough in God that we are willing to pray to Him and ask him to meet our needs and protect us from adversity. Although such prayers are self-serving, they are, nevertheless proper, because we read in John 16:24:

*“Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.”*

But notice the Scripture does not just say “ask,” it says “in My name.” That little difference is not so little as to merely attach “in the name of Yeshua” to our prayers; it means what we read in Matthew 21:22:

*“And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.”*

“Believing” is the key, and it is tied to another Scripture, James 4:3 that warns us:

*“You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.”*

You see, “believing” is not just believing in God or in Yeshua – it is believing that God will answer your prayer. And your new spirit cannot believe that God will answer your prayer if it is contrary to God’s will – contrary to what God wants you to pray for. And this is, in turn, linked to another Scripture, 1 John 3:22, that says:

*“And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.”*

And all of this comes down to a principle of God’s order called faith, for as Hebrews 11:6 says:

*“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”*

If we have that kind of faith, the promise of Matthew 11:28-30 is available to us:

*“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”*

Do you see how all of these Scriptures and principles are tied together? If you focus on just one of them and exclude the others, you might mistakenly come to believe that once you confess Yeshua you become spiritual, and the power of God is transferred to your hands to get anything you want; but that's not that way it is at all, and the truly spiritual man knows this.

Let's go back briefly to the minimal spirituality we spoke of earlier – the willingness to acknowledge God and to pray to Him prayers of petition. While pursuing God for our protection and relief by might seem to be a no-brainer, most people – even those who profess belief in God -- do not pray at all, or only pray to God as a last resort. How often have we heard a doctor portrayed on television saying to a patient's family: "I have done all I can for him; there is nothing left to do now but pray."?

Why does a statement such as that so often pass for reasonable? It is because many people believe in God intellectually – that is, they believe that there exists a creator of all whom they call God – but relatively few people believe that God is really alive to us – that He has power, that He loves us, and that He is willing and able to help us with our needs. But how can people know that and be sure of that? Where do we learn learn it from? They may have been told that by someone, but, of course, we ultimately know it from the Bible.

If we only believe in God intellectually and do not know or believe what's in the Bible, we don't have information about who God is, what He's like, and what he can and wants to do for us. It's then no wonder that we don't pray to Him as a first resort, and don't have confidence that He will respond by giving us relief! So if we have a lack of biblical knowledge, even if we do pray, there is often no power in it because, while we may believe in God, we don't know in faith that God is our Heavenly Father and that He cares about us and is willing to intervene in our lives. Bottom line: Belief in the truth of the Scriptures is absolutely essential for having a meaningful relationship with God, and therefore godly spirituality is inseparable from belief in the Bible. You cannot think of yourself as a disciple believer if you are sure about Yeshua, but not sure about the truth and accuracy of the Bible.

On the other hand, if we do take the trouble to read the Scriptures, two beneficial things happen: (1) We become acquainted with who our Heavenly father and Messiah are, and (2) our faith in them will build. Romans 10:17 says:

*“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”*

It's a promise that is supernatural, and therefore our logic cannot grab hold of it. If we hear God's words, we will acquire faith to believe in what He says; and how do we go about hearing God's words? By exposing ourselves to what is written in Scripture – either through reading it, or through hearing it preached.

I always pray as my primary means of coping with all of life's problems, and I recommend it without reservation to others because God can, and often does, help us out of our difficulties even if our faith level is low. And by the way, don't think of prayer as mere therapy. Therapy, of whatever kind and whatever operative theory, is a natural solution to emotional problems –

not to be dismissed, yet natural, and therefore limited by what is natural. The reason prayer works so well is because God is supernatural and His power has no such limitation.

Anyone who has not been relying on prayer to help them with the stresses of their life will be taking a very big step if they begin now. However, there is more of God available to us than just His answering prayer, so why not get the full complement of what He has to offer? Marvelously, the full complement of what God has to offer you is Himself. He says that He doesn't want to be a distant God, but rather a constant fatherly companion to us just for the asking. We know this because Scripture says so. A father instructs his child because he loves his child, and so it is with God; speaking of His instructions to us, He tells us in Deuteronomy 30:11-14:

*"For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it."*

And in Revelation 3:20-21, Yeshua tells us, not only is God's Word close at hand, but He Himself is close at hand, for he says:

*"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."*

Notice that opening our door to Yeshua causes us to be over comers. Over comers of what? Of being crushed and destroyed by the adversities of life. If we are being stressed by the adversities of our lives we are not overcoming, and Yeshua promises to give us victory so that we can overcome.

All of this is part of being spiritual, but you see we have now taken a step beyond merely praying to God to solve our problems – we have now asked God Himself to enter our lives and take control; that's an order of magnitude larger. If we want to know what real godly spirituality is, it's pursuing a continuous personal relationship with God, and releasing control of our lives to Him.

When Yeshua was asked by a Pharisee what is the most important commandment, Yeshua answered him:

*"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:37-39)*

If you want to be spiritual, to be an over comer of life's adversities through godly spirituality, then this is what is needed – to invite Yeshua into your life and give Him control – to love Him and your heavenly Father with all of your heart, soul and strength, and then to apply that love to all persons in your life, including those whom you casually encounter, so that they too might

receive the blessings of God. If you do these things, your life will be so completely changed, that stresses such as worry and fear will no longer have a place in it, and then you will know what true disciplined spirituality is.

### Questions

1. What is the constitutes minimum spirituality?
2. What is carnality?
3. Can a man be both spiritual and carnal?
4. What does it mean to crucify one's flesh?
5. What does Scripture mean when it exhorts us to put off the old man and put on the new man?
6. Scripture says that we ask but don't receive because we ask "amiss." What are some ways that we can ask amiss?
7. Why isn't it possible to please God without faith? Why aren't our good works enough to please Him?
8. What are some reasons that we don't go to God as a first resort when things get tough?
9. Why is knowing and believing Scripture vitally important?
10. Does God only answer the prayers of believers in Yeshua?
11. What does the *Sh'ma* have to do with spirituality?