

Way of the Spirit

Jesus-centred images of godliness

THE SPIRITUAL PATH

Being spiritual

Spirituality is something that connects the whole human family together. Its language and ideas are common to everyone, while at the same time being unique to each individual person. People across the cultures and faith traditions of the world understand its fundamental nature, albeit in different ways. In an age when traditional religion is frequently challenged spirituality becomes a centre towards which many are drawn. How often do you hear someone say, “I’m not religious but I am spiritual”?¹

‘Spirituality’ is defined as ‘the state of being spiritual’². The English word ‘spirit’ comes from the Latin *spiritus*, which means ‘breath’. The image and language of ‘breath’ touches the enigma of being something physical and yet being invisible; bridging the dimensions of the seen and the unseen and drawing them together. In many cultures ‘breath’, ‘wind’, ‘spirit’ are seen as speaking of that which has its source in the divine. So spirituality is to do with ‘those invisible but real qualities that shape the life of a person or a community ... their inner identity - the sum of those invisible but real forms which make them what they are.’³

Spirituality is the understanding and activity that integrates the visible and invisible, the physical and the spiritual, the human and the divine. There is a deep innate awareness of this. People sense this and are drawn by it, as with a hunger or thirst, but also with questions and curiosity.

All points of the compass

Across the globe and down through history people and communities have responded to the challenge of spirituality in many different ways:

- Some see it as the only ultimate reality to which we must make every effort to escape, breaking free from a corrupt world;
- Some see it as essentially non-existent, simply the product of brain function and human psychology;
- Some see it as pointing towards a different realm of being which exists in parallel alongside the physical realm we inhabit;
- Some see it simply as a natural part of the true expression of reality; the physical and spiritual as an integrated whole.

¹ In 1995 Nottingham University did a student survey asking a random sample how many of them would say they had had a spiritual experience, 35% said they had. In the year 2000 they repeated the same survey, this time 73% of the students claimed they had had a spiritual experience. How might we account for this significant increase in just five years?

² See *Chambers English Dictionary*

³ Gordon Mursell *The Story of Christian Spirituality* Lion 2001 p 9



Within this simple framework of ideas about spirituality individuals and groups have interpreted them in a multitude of ways. These in turn have given birth to numerous religious forms and shaped cultures significantly. We have seen women and men of great spiritual integrity; character and wisdom emerge. We have also seen terrible actions attributed to spiritual inspiration. It has led some to escapism but others to affirmation. Some are 'desperately seeking something' to pursue experiences, often for their own sake, while others discover deep contentment. Some see a world of dualism where others find only harmony. With such diversity within spirituality where should Christians stand?

Question

How do you think the word 'spirituality' is usually understood in our society? Give examples where you can.

JESUS SPIRITUALITY

Christian response

Spirituality is at the very core of what it means to be a Christian; it is embraced wholeheartedly. We recognise the point of connection it gives with all other people. We share and listen to stories of spiritual journeys and the desire to encounter truth. Human history and culture has provided a wealth of spiritual experience much of which is profoundly insightful. However, what makes Christian spirituality distinctive is its focus on the person of Jesus.

Incarnation and integration

The belief that Jesus is the incarnation of God:

'He is the outshining of God's glory
and the exact imprint of God's very being'
(Heb 1:3)

'For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily'
(Col 2:9)

While at the same time he is truly and completely human in every sense of the word:

"Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect"
(Heb 2:17)

"The Word became flesh and lived among us."
(Jn 1:14)

In Jesus the barriers between the physical and spiritual, human and divine are totally removed:

“Very truly, I tell you,
you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God
ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”
(Jn 1:51)

He destroys the dualism and dichotomy that plagues so much other spirituality and leads to escapism, bodily denial and reaching for some higher plane. In Jesus the whole is integrated within itself, and within himself.

Jesus’ incarnation examples what it truly means to be human. He is the model of how we should live:

“No pupil is greater than their teacher; ...
a pupil should be satisfied to become like their teacher.”
(Mt 10:24)

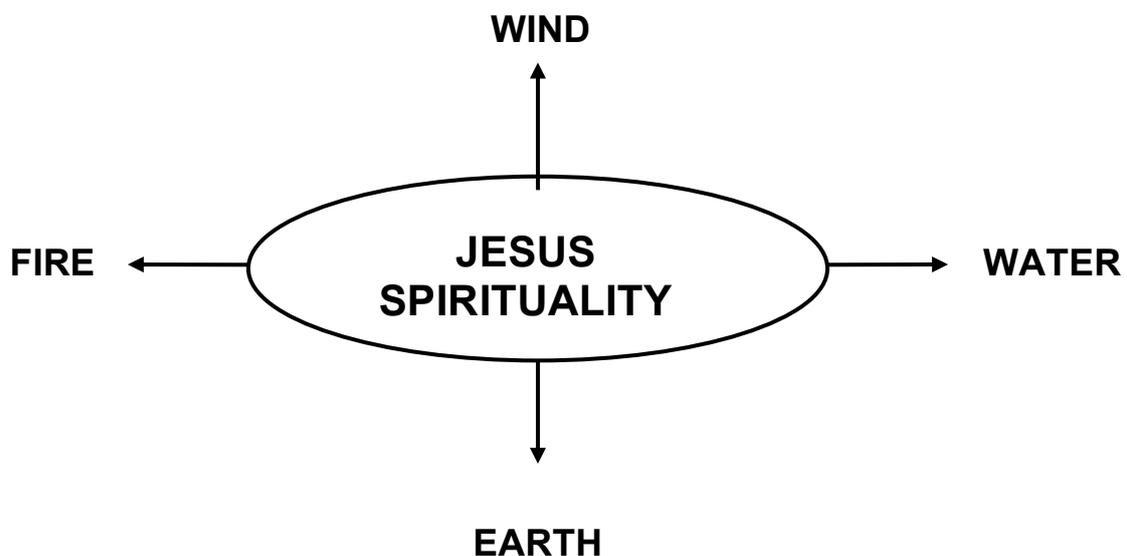
Notice that beyond his resurrection and ascension Jesus promises to remain with his disciples in the person of the Spirit. Another like him who only speaks of him:

“He will glorify me,
for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”
(Jn 16:14)

Christian spirituality, by its very nature is both Jesus centered in its focus and Christlike in its consequences.

Jesus spirituality

In Jesus’ teaching and throughout the New Testament the Jesus-influenced spirituality is expressed in a multitude of images. To give a point of focus to our reflections we are going to draw some of the main ones together under the structure of the four primal elements of wind, earth, fire and water:



WIND

Spirit of life

'Wind', 'breath', 'spirit' is the most primal image for spirituality. Biblically it is also foundational, (Heb: *ruach*, Gk: *pneuma*). In the imagery of the creation of the cosmos we are told:

'A wind from God swept over the face of the waters'
(Gen 1:2)

God's 'word' and God's 'breath' bring creation into being and sustain it:

'By the word of the Lord the heavens were made,
and all the host by the breath of his mouth'
(Ps 33:6)

The red clay of the earth, *adamah*, becomes a human being by the in-breathing of God's breath

'The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground,
and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,
and the man became a living being'
(Gen 2:7)

Working with this imagery Jesus dramatically says:

The wind blows wherever it wills,
you hear its sound,
but you know neither its source, nor its goal;
so it is with everyone born of the Spirit.
(Jn 3:8)

This is the essential character of the new covenant spiritual person and the fruit of Christian spirituality.

Christians see spirituality at the very heart of what it truly means to be a person. It is what makes people distinctive within the world. God's breath infuses human beings with uniqueness (Gen 2:7)⁴. We are so profoundly physical, we are wonderfully integrated into the whole of creation; but we are also spirit. We are open to the unfathomable depths and breathtaking vistas of God; to his awesome moral and spiritual being (Jn 4:24).

⁴ This is not to imply that other creatures and in fact the whole of creation is not energized by the Spirit or does not have spiritual awareness, because scripture makes it very clear that it does. It is simply making the point about the apparent unique nature of human spirituality.

Spirit of freedom

Spirituality is walking the way of the Spirit. It is blowing with the breath of God. It is dancing with mystery while affirming reality. It is unfettered freedom, but not escapism. A way of being that affirms us in being in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27). Deep within each one of us there is a sense of dependence and longing: the child for the parent, the lover for the beloved. It is not reaching into a void in search of something; it is reaching out in love to touch someone. It is not simply searching, but finding. It is not just we who are reaching towards God, but God reaching out towards us and meeting us.

Spirit of truth

True spirituality is a way of being, a way of seeing and a way of becoming:

- It embraces all truth from the point of view of personal experience and encounter;
- It is my total response to the totality of truth;
- It is knowledge of the living God through Jesus and displaying the evidence of that in my behaviour and lifestyle.

“I will ask the Father,
and he will give you another Helper to be with you forever.
This is the Spirit of truth.”
(Jn 14:16-17)

‘Wind-child catch the wind!’

EARTH

Radical mystic

We are children of the wind, yet at the same time shaped from the dark soil of the earth; brought to life by divine breath. This is the mystery.

The word ‘mystic’ comes from the word ‘mystery’; it is someone working with ‘mystery involving a sacred or secret meaning hidden from the eyes of the ordinary person and only revealed to the spiritually enlightened’⁵. The New Testament makes a number of significant references to the theme of ‘mystery’ (Gk: *musterion*) and the Christian spiritual experience (eg Mk 4:11, Col 2:2).

“To you it has been given to know
the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.”
(Mt 13:11)

Christian spirituality looks at the world through very different eyes. Christians are unashamedly mystics. They are ‘radical mystics’. They do not live in some

⁵ Adapted from the *Chambers English Dictionary*



other world, but are firmly rooted ⁶ in the realities of this life while at the same time seeing our physical world alive with the ethereal. Our roots are deeply embedded into the world and into God but at the same time we see time and space embraced by the eternal. Christian mysticism is about strong 'connectedness' to the physical world, while at the same time under the open heaven of the spiritual. This enables us to live by different rhythms, different values and different perspectives. God has opened our eyes to see.

Christian spirituality is not to do with experiences; it is to do with becoming. We all have a sense of unfulfilled potential, which is more than simply opportunity can release. To be, within ourselves, integrated and mature within a wholeness that harmonizes with all things. To feel like this is astonishing in itself; but we know that it is a God implanted longing that we would search after him and find him. The way of the Spirit is the door. As Qoheleth says:

'God has put eternity into their hearts'
(Ec 3:11)

Tree of Life

'Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal,
flowing from the throne of God ... on either side of the river,
the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month;
and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations ...
Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the
tree of life.'
(Rev 22:1-2, 14)

One of the most powerful biblical images in relation to spirituality is the 'Tree of Life'. From the very beginning its fruit is available for eating,⁷ offering life for all who do. Those who eat, themselves, become a 'Tree of Life' to others. Ultimately it is the centrepiece of the new heaven and earth.⁸

We have already referred to spirituality as 'radical', when speaking of being a 'radical mystic'. It is shaped from the Latin 'radix', meaning 'root', and is directly connected to the idea of a tree. It has two main senses:

- **'Going to the root'**; discovering what is foundational, fundamental, original, inherent, essential and primal. There is something deep, dark, earthy, hidden and mysteriously wonderful in this sense of the word.
- **'Flowing from the root'**; encountering what brings structure, nourishment, security, growth and fruitfulness. There is something profound, life giving, energising, ethereal and eternal in this sense of the word.

A great tree has symmetry. Branches reach high and visible above the ground, matched exactly by its root system deep and hidden beneath the

⁶ Radical comes from the Latin 'radix' which means 'of the roots'

⁷ Gen 2:9

⁸ Rev 22:1-2, 14



earth. This is a wonderful picture of reality. For everything that makes up the visible world there is a depth that is invisible; also, the visible is totally dependent on the invisible for its existence and meaning. These are not two parallel universes, but *one* completely integrated whole. This perfectly describes what we are saying about spirituality.

Fruit of the Spirit

The person who feeds on the 'Tree of Life' becomes a 'Tree of Life' to others.⁹

'The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life'
(Prov 11:30)

A gentle tongue is a tree of life
(Prov 15:4)

Fruit is the essential fulfillment of the tree or the vine. The quality of fruit is the absolute test as to the quality of the plant. It is quite obvious then that scripture sees a spiritual person being like a tree and its fruit:

Happy is the person who rejects the advice of the wicked..
But finds delight in the law of Yahweh,
and meditates on his law day and night.
Such a person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
yielding its fruit in season,
its leaf does not wither; and whatever they do prospers.
(Ps 1:1-3)

I am the vine and my Father is the vinedresser..
Abide in me, and I in you.
As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself,
unless it abides in the vine,
neither can you unless you abide in me.
I am the vine, you are the branches;
the one who abides in me and I in them,
bears much fruit.
(Jn 15:1-5)

Our fruit is what we are (Isa 57:19; Heb 13:15). Our fruit is to be fruit for God (Rm 7:4). It is to be the fruit of righteousness, which comes through Jesus to God's praise and glory (Phil 1:11). It is to be the fruit of light that is goodness, righteousness and truth (Eph 5:9). The fruit is the fruit of the Spirit; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

In Genesis 1:12, 29 there is the re-occurring phrase 'the seed is in the fruit'. The implication is that the 'fruit is in the seed' – the spiritual person is a Tree of Life, and as people feed on the fruit of the lives of a spiritual person, the seed (and therefore the potential fruit) is passed on to them, with the

⁹ Ps 1:1-3; Prov 11:30; 15:4



possibility of it germinating and that other person also becoming a Tree of Life, who in turn will also produce seed-bearing fruit.

Fruit is the unquestionable sign of spirituality. What your fruit is you are. What you are is what you do. What you do is your fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree good fruit (Mt 7:15-20; Lk 6:43-44; Ja 3:12). Jesus is clear; fruit bearing comes only out of the union between the vine and its branches (Jn 15:1-17); as the branch is to the vine so we must be to him. At the heart of fruitfulness is pruning; to be rid of dead wood and to stimulate more fruit.

Fruitfulness and water interlink as metaphors of spirituality. Water brings fruitfulness, and the tree and vine need water to be fruitful (Ezk 47:7-12; Rev 22:2; Ps 1:3).

The fruit of the spiritual person is eschatological fruit. The fruit of the Spirit is multiple (Gal 5:22), as is that of the Tree of Life (Gen 2:9; Ezk 47:12-14; Rev 22:2). The spiritual person is grafted into the Tree of Life, feeds on it and shares in its fruit bearing.

Buried treasure

Deep within the earth there is treasure to be found. In the form of hidden gems and precious stones, or a cache of gold and silver secreted for safekeeping to be retrieved sometime in the future.

History shows that the promise of gold or treasure will entice people to do almost anything. For Christians the call of the Spirit entices us to search for buried treasure, a trail that will lead us into the depths of God and the depths of ourselves.

The key question is, "What do we really treasure?" Because what we treasure will determine what we set our heart on, and what it pursues (Mt 6:21). This is a deciding factor in spirituality, which will condition everything else. Our heart is where the treasure seeking starts. Deep within the subterranean caverns of our beings God has hidden priceless treasure:

The good person,
out of the good treasure of their heart,
brings out good.
(Lk 6:45)

We have this treasure in earthen vessels.¹⁰
(2Cor 4:7)

¹⁰ In the ancient world many people did not trust banks and so kept their wealth in clay pots in their home to protect it. Excavations in Beit She'an in Israel have revealed a city wrecked in the aftermath of a huge earthquake. Under one huge column they found the crushed skeleton of a man clutching a smashed clay pot from which gold coins spilled. Obviously after an initial light tremor he rushed home to get his wealth only to be caught by the main shock while running through the market square. The moral of this story is self-evident!

We are to search for it, find it and begin to share it. This is the glorious adventure God calls the spiritual person to join in. The truth of course is that the key to the hidden treasure is Jesus:

Know God's secret, which is Christ himself.
He is the key that opens all the hidden treasures
of God's wisdom and knowledge.
(Col 2:3)¹¹

In finding Jesus the vaults of God's unfathomable riches are opened up within our hearts. Our heart is the doorway but heaven itself is the extent to which the treasure house extends; with limitless seams of gold, silver and precious stones. We are to be prospectors in our spiritual endeavour, we will certainly find pearls without price, but we will also stumble on hidden caches. In every instance we are to sell all we have in order to make it our own (Mt 13:44-46).

FIRE

Burning presence

Like the wind, fire is one of the most ancient and primal of spiritual images. Sourced dramatically from the sky by the sun or lightening flash, or mysteriously by friction, its flickering or leaping flames seem to have a life of their own – both constant and unpredictable. Bringing light into darkness, warmth against the cold, a means of cooking food and a centre for the community to gather; plus many other fascinating qualities and expressions. It is easy to see its power as a symbol of spirituality and the divine.

In the Hebrew scriptures the image of fire is used of God personally; of the divine glory (Ezk 1:4,13; 10:6-7; Dan 7:9; 10:6), protecting presence (2Kg 6:17; Zec 2:5) and holiness (Dt 4:24; Heb 12:29). It is also used of God's righteous judgment (Zec 13:9; Mal 3:2; 1Cor 3:13) and the destruction of evil (cf Isa 66:15-16; Mal 4:1). Theophanies of God are often accompanied by fire, such as the 'Burning bush' (Ex 3:2), the 'Pillar of Fire' (Ex 13:21-22) and the 'Covenant on Mt Sinai' (Ex 19:18, Dt 4:11). It is also used of prophetic inspiration (Jer 5:14; 20:9; 23:29)

Ablaze with the Spirit

In Jesus we see the image of fire linked to both personal spirituality and the eschatological purposes of God.

The language and image of fire gives focus to Jesus' experience of baptism. John the Baptist says of Jesus:

'I baptize you with water ...
he will baptize you in Holy Spirit and fire.'
(Mt 3:11)

¹¹ Job 28:1-28 gives a graphic image of the search for wisdom being like being like ancient miners digging deep into the earth or lowering themselves down perilous shafts into the darkness in search for precious metals and stones.

This is referring not only to a personal experience of being overwhelmed by the power and presence of God, but to the inauguration of the new creation by a wave of Spirit and fire: liberating, purifying and energizing. Jesus would later say:

‘I came to cast fire upon the earth
and how I wish it were already kindled!’
(Lk 12:49)

We see the harmonizing of the images of ‘wind’ and ‘fire’ in the account of the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost:

‘... the sound of a rush like a violent wind ... divided tongues as of fire,
appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.’
(Acts 2:3)

Here the experience of the divine life and power becomes the dynamic centre of a new dimension of spirituality. This clearly continues to be an understanding of the early Christian community as Paul says:

‘... be ablaze with the Spirit’
(Rm 12:11)

WATER

Spring of water

Whoever drinks the water I give will never thirst,
it will become in them a fountain of water
springing up to eternal life.
(Jn 4:14)

If anyone thirsts let them come to me and drink.
The person who believes in me,
as the scriptures have said,
“Out of their innermost being
will flow rivers of living water.”
(Jn 7:37-38)

Water is life. In a desert climate water is the source of existence. It may be found in deep hand-dug wells, rock-hewn stone cisterns, clay jars or animal skins. A well is of course a lifeline, but to the Bedouin mind, water at its most beautiful is a bubbling spring; water rising from unknown depths underground with a coolness, taste and fragrance beyond description - this is ‘living water’ – the water of the desert oasis. This is a Bedouin term and frequent biblical image of a spiritual person – someone who is a walking oasis.

Yahweh is the ‘fountain of living waters’ in complete contrast to the water in hand-hewn cisterns (Jer 2:13; 17:13). God's promise of life and blessing is

frequently expressed in terms of pouring out water on a thirsty land (cf Isa 44:3). He calls to the thirsty to come and drink (Isa 55:1). These ideas provide the force behind Jesus' declarations (Jn 4:14; 6:35; 7:37-38).

The spiritual person is like a watered garden and a spring that never fails (Isa 58:11; Jer 31:12; Song 4:15); with a constant bubbling life from the subterranean depths below (Jn 4:14; 7:37-38). However, what flows from our lives must be pure if it is true. No spring flows with both fresh and bitter water, you get no drinking water from salt ponds (Ja 3:11-12).

The living water is of course from that eschatological river of God. The river that has its source as a trickling spring in the Most Holy place in the Temple and flows with increasing volume and astonishing fruitfulness to irrigate the Dead Sea with life (Ezk 47:1-12). The river 'of the water of life' that flows through the New Jerusalem (Rev 22:1-2).

Here is a perfect picture of spirituality. Water sourced in God, a fountain within the deepest recesses of the individual, flowing out in abundance to others.

Question

What things do you think are essential to a Christian understanding of the word 'spirituality'?

Question

Identify two biblical images of a spiritual person. Describe what they communicate about a spiritual person, briefly commenting on the particular significance of each.

Question

Choose a contemporary image that might be useful to communicate the idea of a spiritual person in today's society and describe what aspects of spirituality it communicates.

MAKING PROGRESS

'Work out your own salvation
with fear and trembling
for it is God at work in you,
both to will and to work
for his good pleasure.'
(Phil 2:12-13)

There is nothing static about spirituality; it is full of forward movement. Spirituality is a serious business and it involves effort and looks for radical change. It is something we work at and work out, making the transition from being to becoming. It is a process that is in progress. Spirituality has its source and energy in God, which we embrace and make our own. God is also the goal to which it is heading and the pattern to which it is conforming. Its final fulfillment is future, but this should not make us either impatient or frustrated; it is a positive thing. It is us responding to God and God moving through us, and our discovering joy together. Our personal choices and decisions are central to divine conclusions. Scripture presents spirituality as a process of progress in some graphic forms. There are four of them.

Traveling

'They had not yet received the things God had promised, but saw them far ahead and welcomed them, and admitted openly that they were no more than strangers and passing travelers on earth. Those who say such things make it clear that they are looking for a country of their own ... we find them longing for a better country, the heavenly one. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God; for he has a city ready for them.' (Heb 11:13-16)

Spirituality is a journey. It is a quest, both an inner and an outer venture into God. The idea of spiritual life being a wayfaring one recurs throughout Scripture. The experience of God and the experiment with truth, within time, have all the feelings of being a traveller. The sense of purpose and direction has all the sense of destination. Furthermore, you learn much about a person by how they travel, and the road they take reveals their goal and purposes:

- The 'lonely planet' traveller with just a rucksack, passport and the open road;
- The 'every eventuality' traveller carrying every conceivable item possible.

To speak about 'the Way' is to speak about God's purpose and will (Ex 33:13; Job 21:14; Ps 67:2; Prov 8:22; Ezek 18:25), it can also refer to a person's conduct (Ps 1:1,6; Prov 30:19-20). The earliest description of the church was to refer to it as 'the Way' (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). This would have been based on the Messianic interpretation of the 'highway of Yahweh' (Isa 40:3, 10-11) and more directly on Jesus' declaration of being 'the Way' (Jn 14:6; cf. Heb 10:19). Christians are the true 'new age travellers'!

Jesus is the both the way, and the one who shows us the way with his call to, 'Follow me' (e.g. Mk 1:17; Matt 8:22; 9:9; 19:21). Jesus is the 'pioneer / perfecter' of the faith (cf. Heb 12:2). The spiritual journey demands serious choice; it is a narrow way that requires discipline, effort and single-mindedness (Matt 7:13-14; Lk 13:24). It is the Way of Life that is to become a way of life. His disciples are to take up their cross and follow in his steps (Mk 10:21; 1Pt 2:21). It is a way of light, forgiveness and fellowship (1Jn 1:7; cf. Isa 35:8).



Training

'You know that many runners take part in a race but only one of them wins the prize. Run then in such a way as to win the prize. Every athlete in training submits to strict discipline, in order to be crowned with a wreath that will not last; but we do it for one that will last forever. That is why I run straight for the finishing line; that is why I am like a boxer who does not waste time with their punches. I harden my body with blows and bring it under complete control, to keep myself from being disqualified after having called others to the contest.' (1Cor 9:24-27)

Spirituality is like an athlete in training determined to win at the games. New Testament writers saw in the athletics contests of the stadium and the struggle to win the laurels a picture of spiritual experience.

- We stand before the watching world like a runner before the crowd and strip down to the bare essentials so there are no hindrances to our performance (Heb 12:1);
- During the race every sinew and muscle strains to be first, the whole mind concentrates on the prize which is the inspiration to win;
- There is the cry of the crowd, the final kick for the line; everything is down to endurance and you win only if you run according to the rules (Col 2:18; Phil 3:14; Heb 12:1; 2Tm 2:5);
- Having won the race the only thought is, 'I made it!' (2 Tim 4:7-8); the thought of losing is unbearable (Gal 2:2) – the 'fear of the Lord';
- To the victor a reward that is theirs forever (1Pt 5:4).

This is what we are to be like in our desire to embrace the fullness of God. The fact is that we must run as though there is only one winner but in fact we can all be victors if we have the determination and endurance.

Growing

'And we shall all come together to that unity in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God, we shall become mature people, reaching to the very height of Christ's full stature. Then we shall no longer be children ... we must grow up in every way to Christ who is the head. Under his control all the different parts of the body fit together, and the whole body is held together by every joint with which it is provided. So when each separate part works as it should, the whole body grows and builds itself up through love.' (Eph 4:13-16)

Spirituality involves growth and maturity. There is a standard of spiritual stature to which we not only aspire but also at which it is essential we arrive; like a child looking up to and admiring / aspiring to be like a parent or older sibling. This maturity is deeply personal but it is also strongly corporate.



Individually we are to mature, but our maturity is interdependent with all others in the body; each joint vital for the whole. Spirituality is a corporate thing.

Nourishment is the secret of growth; we are what we eat. In the early stages of our spiritual development we are like new born babies and we need pure milk (1Pt 2:2); the basic principles of God's message (Heb 5:12). A major problem in spiritual growth is the transition from milk to solid food; so many are satisfied with an infant's diet (1Cor 3:2; Heb 5:12-13); a sign of their complacency and carnality (1Cor 3:3). Breast-feeding is attractive for an infant but only solid food develops mature growth. Immaturity makes a solid diet impossible, which in turn stunts growth. The ability to feed on solids enables our spiritual senses to be trained, for us to receive wisdom, and in turn to become teachers (Heb 5:12, 14; 1Cor 2:). The food is truth - written text and spoken word, 'the word of righteousness' (Heb 5:13). The call is, 'Let us press on to maturity!' (Heb 6:1).

Changing

'And we, with unveiled faces
reflecting like mirrors the glory of the Lord,
are being transformed into the same image
from glory to glory,
this is the work of the Lord who is Spirit.'
(2 Cor 3:18)

Spirituality is metamorphosis. As believers our lives are in the process of the most phenomenal transfiguration. We are being changed into the uniqueness of Jesus himself (Rm 8:29). It is a sanctification process that transforms everything about us. It is God's will that it happens (1Th 4:3), and he will accomplish it by the power of the Holy Spirit (2Cor 3:18; 1Th 5:23-24; Eph 5:26).

In looking at this transfiguration we touch the heart of the tension between the 'already' and the 'not yet'. We stand in Jesus and all he has done; we are already sanctified (1Cor 1:2; Heb 2:17; 9:13-15; 10:10-14; 1Pet 1:2). However, the process of metamorphosis to become like him is not yet complete (1Jn 3:2).

The change has begun deep within and is breaking out with increasing visibility. It has begun in our heart, the epicenter of our being (cf. 2 Cor 4:6; 5:12). The whole of our inner consciousness is being transfigured (Rom 12:2), bringing a moral and spiritual purity that is visible in goodness and godliness. However, the full extent of what the transformation will be is accessible only to faith (cf. 2 Cor 4:18; 5:17).

We are like a miraculous mirror in which the Spirit is making the invisible visible:

- We 'behold' the glory of the Lord;
- We 'reflect' the glory of the Lord;
- We are being 'transfigured' into the glory of the Lord by the creative power of the Spirit (2Cor 3:18).



We await the final stage of the transfiguration, but it will happen! We shall be changed; and have a body like his glorious body (1Cor 15: 44-53; Phil 3:21). This hope has changing effect in itself (1Jn 3:2-3).

The challenge of spirituality is to become fully what we already are!

Questions

1. When you think about your relationship with God what picture do you have in your mind? Why do you think you have this picture? Do you find it very helpful? Are there other pictures that might help you more?
2. What particular things in your spiritual journey do you believe God wants you to strive for? And what things do you believe you should rest in?
3. Most human societies (from secular to primal), admire the truly spiritual person. Why do you think this is? Equally, however, the genuinely spiritual person can also be seen as a threat, particularly to leaders and the establishment. How do you explain this? What do your observations suggest to you about the significance of the spiritually mature person in society? What do you think are the implications for Christians and the church?

Reading and Resources

M Botting '**A Beginner's Guide to Spirituality**', Grove 1990
R Foster '**Celebration of Discipline**', Hodder 1982
G W Hughes '**God of Surprises**', Darton Longman & Todd 1985
G W Hughes '**Oh God Why?**' The Bible Reading Fellowship 1993
T Merton '**The Seven Storey Mountain**', Harcourt Brace 1948
G Mursell (Ed) '**The Story of Christian Spirituality**', Lion 2001
R Rolheiser '**Seeking Spirituality**', Hodder 1998

