

Taking My Spiritual Life to the Next Level

1. Warm-up: They say a joy is doubled when shared, and a worry is cut in half. So . . .
 - a. As we move into the New Year, what's something you're looking forward to?
 - b. What's something you're worried about?
2. Life is a precious gift that no one wants to waste. We all want to seize our moments and live into the fullness of who we were meant to be. But sometimes we fall short. Sometimes we miss our moments. Jeff told how his inhibitions kept him from asking a little girl to dance at his niece's wedding. In the process, he missed a beautiful moment. How about you? Tell us about a moment you regret missing in your life.
3. We're starting off the New Year with a series of sermons that invites us to reflect on how we're doing spiritually, personally, relationally, and as a church. This week we're focused spiritual self-assessment.
 - a. Jeff said, "Spirituality is the core generative force in life. It's the source of all goodness in your life and mine. All good acts in life spring from 'spiritual impulses.'" What do you think he means? Do you agree or disagree – and why?
 - b. Spirituality should not to be confused with religion. Religion devoid of genuine spirituality can be a source of great evil. Vladimir Putin invokes religion even as he makes war on his brothers and sisters in Ukraine, bombing hospitals, nurseries, schools, and power plants. How would you describe the difference between religion and spirituality?
 - c. In Luke 10, Jesus tells the Parable of the Good Samaritan. There, two orthodox religious leaders see a fellow Jew left by the side of the road to die after being mugged. Both leaders look away and pass by. Then along comes a Samaritan. The religion of the Samaritans differed from the Jews; Jews believed Samaritans didn't worship God in the right way. Yet the Samaritan went to extraordinary lengths to rescue the dying Jewish man. At the end of his story, Jesus told his listeners that the Samaritan was on the path of life and the Jewish religious leaders weren't. What does this tell us about the relative importance of knowing correct doctrine vs. having a loving heart? Why is heart more important than head?
 - d. In Matthew 16:25, Jesus said, "Those who want to save their life will lose it, but those who lose their life for my sake will find it." What do you think he means?
 - e. Jeff said that when we get the spiritual side of life right, everything else in life comes together. His point was not that everything comes up roses for deeply spiritual people, but rather that deeply spiritual people discover that they can thrive through anything life throws at them. Tell us about a time you've seen a deeply spiritual person triumph through great adversity.

4. Our scripture passage this week tells us a story that gives insight into what it takes to sustain a deep spiritual path in life. The story takes place after Peter had denied ever knowing Jesus during his trial. Read John 21:1-17, selected verses, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. In verses 15-17, Jesus uses the word “agape” (unconditional, sacrificial love) in his first two questions to Peter, then uses “philia” (brotherly love, friendship) in the final question. Each time Peter responds, he uses “philia.” Peter never uses “agape.” What point was Jesus trying to drive home in this dialogue? What insight was Peter supposed to gain?
 - b. Despite his spiritual failure and imperfect love, Peter got up, dusted himself off, and kept on his spiritual path. He went on to become a great apostle who eventually gave his life for his faith as an old man. Peter finally achieved “agape” before he died. There’s a powerful message in that for each of us. Life is constantly going to try to knock us off our spiritual path. Often we’ll fail. But God doesn’t give up on us. Grace keeps calling us forward. Tell us about a time when you almost got knocked off your spiritual path. What brought you back?
 - c. In Matthew 13, Jesus suggests that almost 3 out of every 4 people who begin on a promising spiritual path eventually fall away, unable to sustain that path. Do you believe that’s true? If so, what are the implications for each of us?
5. If spirituality is the key to living life well, each of us needs to consider how can we make sure that we, like Peter, stay on that path. The answer, Jeff suggested, is found in developing deeply ingrained spiritual habits that feed our soul and regularly fill us with spiritual energy. To illustrate, Jeff recounted the old Cherokee story about the two wolves that live inside each of us. Have someone in your group retell the story for any who didn’t hear it. At the end of the story, when asked which wolf wins the war, the Cherokee elder says, “The one we feed.” That’s why spiritual habits that feed the soul are SO CRITICAL to maintaining spiritual momentum in our life.
 - a. Take a look at the spiritual habits listed on p. 3. Which ones are a strong, regular part of your routine?
 - b. Which spiritual habit most feeds your soul?
 - c. Which spiritual habit do you feel most called to start or upgrade as you seek to take your spiritual life to the next level?
 - d. Jeff highlighted the critical importance of worship to the strength of our soul. He compared our soul to a phone battery that wears down and needs recharged. He compared worship to a noncontact phone charging station during which divine energy remotely flows into us, recharging our souls. When we miss worship, our battery gets depleted and it’s hard to stay on course. Do you find worship re-charging? How would you explain to someone what you feel when you worship? How important is weekly worship to your spiritual momentum?

John 21:1-17, selected verses

1 After [his resurrection], Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias.
2 Gathered together there were Simon Peter and several other disciples. 3 Peter said, “I am going fishing.” They said, “We will go with you.” They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

4 Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.
5 Jesus called to them, “Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find [fish].” 6 So they cast it, and they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. 7 The disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!”

9 When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. 10 Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught. Come and have breakfast.”

15 When they finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” Peter said, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.” 16 Then a second time Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter said, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” 17 Then Jesus said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

Powerful Spiritual Habits

