

Spiritual Depth: The Heptagon

Do you know how you are doing spiritually? Do you have a way of doing a spiritual health check for you personally and for you as part of a community?

We often rely on the spiritually intuitive and prophetic. Sometimes we forget that these gifts are for building up body and we can sound critical! We are not praying enough!!!

Sometimes we get a nagging sensation that something is not quite right. We are not sure how to get past this feeling or process it.

Premise – that Jesus and the New Testament writers would commonly use the analogy of the physical world to speak of the spiritual world. The metaphor used most often for spiritual life is biological or physical life.

The analogy of nature and biology gives us an insight into that which lies beyond physical sight, inside of us and that which is happening beyond us.

Amazing how many biological parables there are! Even the “Body of Christ” is a biological metaphor. Something is bugging me. What is this? Is there something that I need to think through?

All biologists tell us that there are 7 processes of life. They are always present in any biological reality and are necessary for it to be alive. If it doesn't then it's moving into decay and death.

The 7 processes are:

Movement, Respiration, Sensitivity, Growth, Reproduction, Excretion, Nutrition

(Excretion – always there in biological system!)

As spiritual life begins to emerge in any individual or community, we can track the 7 processes.

Brief reflection - look at them in the life of Jesus and use them to analyse / reflect. This is a reflective tool to look at your own life, marriage, small group, church to be able to track what the Spirit is doing among you.

Movement:

Movement takes place in response to stimuli. A plant does move. If you have seen time elapse films, plants are moving towards the sun, growing in a particular way, usually stimulated by the presence of light. Other biological entities respond to other stimuli. Pain and hunger stimulate movement. Reproduction – the migration of huge herds of wildebeest, from their need to reproduce and feed their off spring.

Within creation that is a reflection of who God is and how he operates. We see in movement what God by his Spirit wants to do in the natural and spiritual world.

God intends us to be on the move – the final word of Jesus “Get moving, Go!” Stimulation was Jesus sending them to do this.

Respiration:

Difficult to fully understand. Not just breathing! Tied into it. Respiration takes place at the cellular level, chemical exchange in the mitochondria, the power house. Oxygen comes in to ignite the cell to life and growth. Drawing in of life that produces energy for activity.

Third person of trinity – described in terms of breath, ruach and pneuma. Fascinating, word is ‘Breath’ not ‘Holy Spirit’. Opportunity to reflect more deeply.

Sensitivity:

Produced by receptor cells throughout your body. They bring to us information about the world. Through the 5 senses but also in such a way that you know without thinking what is going on around you.

Paul – inner and outer reality. Conscience seared their conscious, desensitised to the spiritual reality. Pharaoh hardened his heart in Exodus.

Often referred to with biological metaphors “Spanktha” word for gut in the New Testament. Old translation - “I speak to you from the bowels of Christ”. Philemon – Paul (NIV) – refreshing the hearts of the saints. I came to you gut tired and I was very sensitive to my weariness and exhaustion. “Your sensitivity to me allowed me to restore my guts”.

I wonder whether our receptor cells are working.

¹⁹Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. (John 5:19)

Are you sensitive to what God is doing in the people around you?

Jesus had compassion on the crowds. The capacity to be sensitive is linked to the capacity to respire. Something to think about how we are breathing in the Spirit of the Lord. Are we really open to what God is doing around us?

This is not just for the mystics! Jesus said open your eyes and you will see. The fields are white unto harvest. Their receptor cells were not working!

Growth:

We can be pretty clear about that one. If it's alive it grows!

We are all growing, producing cells that are being removed from the body because they are no longer of use.

Reproduction:

In every species God designed, that species sacrifices everything for the new generation. Except human beings!

We have begun to develop a degree of selfishness that is not seen in any other part or species in creation.

Yet – how large is the budget for new believers and children in your Church?

Reproduction is such an enormous goal within the created order!

Church planters – struggling for money

Children's workers – auctions etc to get enough money

Alpha course needs funds

Interesting that reproduction / multiplication of who we are is so important to every species except humans.

If we were less affluent we would reproduce more! Poorer Churches are reproducing far quicker because they have nothing else to do! They are totally committed to reproduction!

Excretion:

Interesting that there is a constant call in scripture to remove that which is toxic to us both at individual and corporate level.

Acquisitive nature? – the truth is that there are hundreds of occasions in scripture where the counsel is to let it go! If we would just live Matthew 18:15 in our communities, 90% of the problems in our churches would disappear.

¹⁵"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. (Matthew 18:15)

Everyone wants the silver bullet not the 1000 reasons why? If there was one this might be it!

Amazing that Christians don't do what Jesus said and that Pastors collude!

They come to us to talk about someone else and we collude! Danger, abuse, violent situations only cases where we should talk.

People can list the ways in which they have been hurt by someone else – it's a discipline to turn them around and tell them to say it to the person that they have an issue with!

Most of the time what we think occurred never happened anyway.

We need to learn to live a life of godly brokenness and be honest with each other. Simple excretion!

Maybe we need some of these fibrous verses to get us moving again.

Nutrition:

Jesus spoke of himself as the bread of life. Lords Supper refers to spiritual nourishment; this is my body, eat it!

Not only relevant they become compelling. 1 Corinthians 15, Paul's description of the resurrection, natural body and the spiritual body. What is and what will happen.

³For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. ⁶After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. (1 Cor 15:3 – 8)

These people thought like this all the time. The world was a medium through which they could understand the spiritual realm. We have become so materialistic we can't see it!

He made us in his image. This is not trying to be spooky or post modern, but challenging us to think beyond this rational mindset.

We can be more affected by the renaissance than the resurrection. We have so little spiritual perspective. God has given us the world as a spiritual aid!

How did Jesus live the 7 processes of life?

Movement:

Jesus returned from the Jordon and was "led" into the desert by a compelling force – he was grabbed by Holy Spirit. Spiritual life involves movement.

High Priestly Prayer – **John 17** – being sent and sending his disciples.

Church of England – Non Movement. Organisation and Organism – horse and cart. Some churches have the cart before the horse. In England we have the horse inside the cart. Royal carriage that moves, only reason it's moving is because it's going downhill!

All communities need to move, joining the mission of God in the world. When Jesus called 12 together he gave them authority to heal the sick!

Respiration:

Jesus taken by Spirit and moved into the desert full of the Spirit. In those 40 days something happened. He came out of the desert full of the power of the Holy Spirit. It was energising because Jesus was praying in the desert. Jesus often returned to opportunities to breathe again. To lonely places.

Holding breath or hyper ventilating - God's going to do amazing things. They get excited, a bit dizzy and fall over!

Charismatic movement? Generally because they were raised in Churches that held their breath!

Holding your breath means there are occasions when you have to breathe. Why can't the life of the Spirit be natural breathing!

Prayer is breathing – Hallersby.

Breathing in the presence of God allowing him to fill us. Very natural about it. Sometimes his pulse increased and he blurted out "Thank you God that you have not revealed this truth to the wise".

At other times he could lessen his breathing rate. Are you conscious of inviting the spirit to work within you all the time? Welcome Holy Spirit, do what you want with me today.

Father Son and Holy Scriptures? Father Son and Holy Catholic Church?

Sensitivity:

Jesus knew what they were thinking, which is easier to say your sins are forgiven. So that you may know.

The Son can only do what he sees the Father doing – chapter before, open your eyes disciples.

Do you know what God is doing in your life, your spouse, your Church?

Do you know in your experiential knowledge (Epignosis) not rational knowledge?

We reject the gift because we reject the packaging. How bizarre! (Christmas wrapping paper story) Gift was fantastic but she could not spend money on the wrapping paper.

We have been repelled by some of the movements that have espoused the spiritual gifts. This is a mistake if we are rejecting the gifts because of the wrapping.

Would you love to know what is really going on around you? What's God saying to people you have never met? Amazing breakthroughs! Christian Roulette! Really fun, although you do die at some stage.

Who says you can't do that? The gift of the Spirit was universally given at Pentecost. Everyone prophesies, everyone gets to hear the voice of God. That's the way that Jesus was and I want to be like him.

Zacchaeus up a tree - how do you know my name? I am coming to your house for tea!

How wired in are you?

Horse whispering – Do you really want to come close? You can but there is a boundary to cross.

Are you sensitive? Do you hear God's voice? It's not just for the wackos, it's for everyone. Jesus was like this and I want to be like him!

People who have heard that their pastorally sensitive hearts are not really needed, that their prophetically sensitive insights are not really wanted.

People clamber out from under the stone when their sensitivity is encouraged.

Growth:

Even Jesus grew, it was one of the realities of the incarnation (**Philippians 2**) - a self-emptying of himself.

Luke 2 – Jesus grew in stature and favour with God and man

⁴⁰And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him. (Luke 2:40)

He grew in his capacity to do things. I only do what I see the Father doing. He had to allow that reality to grow within him. Jesus' life was not a movie film that he had already seen. Rather growing in every moment.

What is the Kingdom of God like? A mustard seed planted in his garden.

The Kingdom of God is Jesus being planted into the life of any circumstance.

Everything about Jesus is complete – is his spiritual DNA emerging in the life where his seed is planted? Is he growing in you and are you growing in him?

Reproduction:

Embryo in Mary

Also says this to his disciples – everything I know I have taught you: John 12. Because of the impartation they will do even more than Jesus did.