

Strengthening Your Walk With God: Taking a Personal, Searching Spiritual Inventory
Sunday, August 4th, 2024 - 5:30 p.m.
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For 7 years I managed a nearly 700 seat restaurant in Toronto; we did a massive inventory every month. This involved counting everything that was part of the restaurant's assets - all the food, the booze, the cutlery and plates, glassware, and all assets such as paper goods, lightbulbs and everything else. It was somewhat tedious and time consuming but it was done for a reason: when we compared the inventory with our sales, food costs and our labour costs, we could see where we might be losing money and where we could fine tune the operations of our day to day activities. There were times where having a good inventory was instructive to us in knowing whether or not we would be profitable and what we could learn to help us do better.

Just as a regular inventory of physical things helped us at the restaurant, a spiritual inventory can show us where we can do better with God's help; it's part of the "renewing of the mind" that we speak about so frequently.

In **Psalm 139:23-24**, David prays **"Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!"**

Implicit in these words are several things for you and me. We see that exploring our hearts and minds are important. Or at least David thought so. And he was a man after God's own heart!

That it's vital to recognize where there are sinful or grievous ways in us, and that the solution to that is to be led by God "in the way everlasting."

Earlier in the same Psalm, David acknowledges his total reliance on God and God's sovereign knowledge of himself. Let's look at ***Psalms 139:1-14***

"O Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it. Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you. For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well."

"What does any of this have to do with taking a personal spiritual inventory," you might ask! David ends the psalm in verses **Psalm 139:23-24** with **"Search me O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous (wicked) way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!"**

These verses at the end of Psalm 139 are a reminder to those of us who love God and want to serve him, that any inventory of our lives needs to be done under His direction! We read earlier that the Lord knows when we sit down or rise up, what we are going to say before we say it, and that there is nowhere we can hide from Him. You are his creation: fearfully and wonderfully made! He's the best guide for your personal spiritual inventory!

Let's explore that for the next few minutes.

Knowing that God knows everything about us including things we don't know or understand or comprehend ourselves, I find it quite wise of David to ask the Lord to be the searcher; but David also implies that he wants to know as well and I hope that's your desire as well.

First of all, how does God let us know about our grievous ways?

He has given us a body, brain and mind with awareness and a conscience.

He has given us his Word for instruction and conviction.

He has given us relationships in our homes, our work, our communities.

He has given us salvation through the work of Jesus at Calvary.

And he has given us his church, the bride of Christ, as a shaping, convicting and helping environment for our growth, sanctification, and healing. Of course, there are many aspects of our lives that need inventorying but this evening I want to focus on just 4 bigger categories, each one of them briefly, and then give you some takeaways to pursue on your own. Frankly, each category is a teaching on its own but we will get the ball rolling!

1. Your Body.

No doubt you've noticed (!) that you have a body and that its state of health determines your vitality, how clearly you think, how well and efficiently you can work and how much you can accomplish day to day. As the Psalmist indicates, you are fearfully and wonderfully made! Your body is unique and a gift from God. Part of the inventory, I'd suggest, is to ask yourself, "Am I showing gratitude to the Lord for the gift of my body? Am I caring for it with proper food and rest? Am I getting the proper amount of exercise for my age and fitness? Or am I ignoring my physical health because of poor prioritizing, old bad habits or lack of knowledge? Each of these questions could be further explored but I think you get my drift here. On a personal note, while I notice changes in my body as I've gotten older, another thing I note is that when I make it a priority to eat healthily and moderately, rest sufficiently, exercise appropriately - I have far more energy, more mental clarity, and generally feel better able to handle my life and work, and serve the Lord.

The next area is...

2. Your Mind.

You've probably also noticed that your mind (and its physical hardware, your brain) have the capacity to help you, hurt you or to harm you. Through your thoughts, priorities, attitudes, and beliefs, your mind is, in essence, the software of your biological computer. Don't misconstrue what I'm saying here; I know you are far more than a biocomputer but it's a useful analogy. In fact, you aren't your mind: you have a mind! But the things you hold to be true about yourself, your faith, your relationships with others and with the Creator determine to a large extent your actions, priorities and life path. God has given us free will and if an out of control mind is driving your bus you'll end up in a swamp or worse!

I've met good Christian volunteers in this church who make statements about their limitations and that they can't do certain things, yet I've seen them, when pushed and cajoled, doing excellent and exceptional work in various ministries. Their self imposed limitations are frequently the results of old beliefs and attitudes that are inaccurate or just plain false. So ask, "Am I glorifying God with my attitudes and beliefs and how those translate into action? Am I held back by old hurts, resentments, grudges and unforgiveness that I hold onto long after the events have passed? If I'm doing that, what specifically would be a better belief to develop or a healthier more godly attitude that will lead me to more appropriate action? Am I ever sabotaging the gifts God has given me with a poor attitude? No wonder the apostle Paul reminds us in **Romans 12:2** "**Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.**"

We are to avoid being negatively influenced by the culture around us, the worldly impacts foisted on us and instead we are to undergo a radical transformation - a metamorphosis, in essence. Are you ready? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you discern where you need a radical change!

3. Your Relationships

No doubt you have lots of relationships of various kinds: work colleagues, Casual friends, close friends, family and you also have a relationship with God. How healthy are these relationships? Are you doing your part to keep them healthy or to heal them if they aren't? What do you need to do to strengthen your relationships? Make amends? Ask for forgiveness? Forgive another? Forgive yourself?

And are you nurturing your relationship with the Lord? Are you reading his Word, spending time in prayer and asking him to speak into your heart and mind? "Search me O God and know my heart....and lead me in the way everlasting!"

4. Your Church Community

The Bible reminds us numerous times that the church is the Bride of Christ. So your church community is important to Jesus and thus needs to be a priority for you! How engaged are you with your church? Do you volunteer? Give it a high priority rating? Or is it mostly your social group? (I'm actually thrilled that Pastor Don asked me to speak on a holiday weekend; it was a

guarantee that we'd have a few more folks out for the service because afterwards.....FREE FOOD!)

What does the Lord want for you as you participate in the life of his and your church community? Why not ask Him? As you go about your weekly activities this coming week I ask you to remember what King David wrote in **Psalms 134:17-18**.

“How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you.”

Knowing the infinite wisdom and guidance available to us through our Heavenly Father, perform a spiritual and moral inventory. As part of your spiritual and moral inventory this week, think about your physical body and your health; ponder the attitudes and beliefs that shape your mind and subsequently, your behaviours; contemplate your relationships with your friends, family and church; and most importantly of all, examine your relationship with God.

In closing, a few words about your relationship with your brothers and sisters in Christ here in our church community:

Galatians 6:1-2 “Brothers and sisters, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.”