1 Thessalonians 3:1-13 The Infinite Value of Personal Spiritual Review

Timothy returned to Corinth and reported back to Paul how the Thessalonians were doing in their walk with God. Paul prayed night and day to see them face to face to "complete what is lacking in your faith". In today's sermon, we will ask ourselves, "What is lacking in my faith?" We are called to regularly engage in the discipline of taking personal spiritual inventory of our walk with Christ.

Waiting Well Requires Constant Spiritual Examination. God calls each of us to spiritual growth and maturity. (Col. 1:27-28). Also, since we are fellow workers of God and ambassadors of Christ, we must remain spiritually healthy. The salt must not lose its "saltiness," or it will be worthless. (So God's concern for my life is my character development and the impact I am making for Him and His kingdom) The goal is to grow up in our faith, and to be established in holiness at the coming of the Lord Jesus.

We are His witnesses and ambassadors; salt and light in corruption, decay, and darkness. SO I must remain vitally healthy; but how will I know? Do not let this world squeeze you into its mold; rather, be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

1. **The Requirement of Spiritual Examination**: a God-centered, honest assessment is not optional; It is a God-commanded vital aspect of spiritual growth and maturity
    a. Consider these passages: Gal. 6:1-5; 2 Cor. 13:4-6; 1 Cor. 11:28; John 6:6
    b. To be of help (give strength, etc), I must be in healthy spiritual shape - not perfect, but able and available; a workman who needs not be ashamed
    c. God is doing this work of ongoing assessment, whether or not we are aware of it or approving of it. (Jeremiah 17:10; 2 Chronicles 16:9)
    d. God's standard is His own holiness, revealed in His law. The law of God opens our eyes and closes our mouths. (Micah 6:8)
        i. Paul was a great help, and Paul was aware of his own state as the "chief of sinners".
        ii. From the beginning, guilt and shame have kept us in hiding... fearful (Adam and Eve, Where are you? Genesis 3)
        iii. If we fail to do this well, we become malnourished, misguided, miserable
            1. Timothy: pay attention to yourself & your doctrine (1 Tim. 4)
        iv. We need constant review of our soul to aid growth and prevent complacency, pride, and shipwreck in the faith.
        v. God's provision of Himself, His Word, His Spirit, His fellow workers, etc. helps us in this discipline.

2. **The Receiving of Spiritual Examination**:
    a. The Spirit searches . . . Romans 8:26-27; Hebrews 4: God's Word is able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart..
    b. How then do we evaluate ourselves? We can't. Rather, we need help.
    c. Not only is it necessary, but this is also a gift!
    d. So do not complain: it's a gift to see if anything is lacking in your faith, since it means you have faith . All these things get a constant checkup for a reason
        i. You have a soul (rather ARE a living soul, created for communion with God) at the center of it all; at the source, root, and core of all of life
            1. "The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness, how great is that darkness" (Matt. 6:22-23)
    e. We need help:
        i. You have a Lord, a Bible, a Church; friends who know and love you
        ii. Our attitudes should be of prayerful expectancy... not fearful dread
        iii. Consider: Psalm 19:11-14; 139:23-24 . . leading to repentance
        iv. 2 Peter 1: add to your faith . . supply by effort what God requires
    f. Christian Resources and tools are more abundant than ever on this subject, and must take place not in isolation but in the context and environment of the local church
    g. How is your . . (central to the letter of 1 Thessalonians)
        i. Faith: Hebrews 11
        ii. Hope: Psalm 27; Isaiah 40
        iii. Love: 1 Cor. 13
    h. In light of your sin, what do you deserve?
    i. In light of His grace, what have you been freely given?

In his book, ***Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health***, author Donald S. Whitney provides a framework for Christians to evaluate genuine spiritual growth and character transformation. Rather than measuring spiritual health by "spiritual busyness" or routine religious activities, Whitney offers ten probing diagnostic questions to help you assess your progressive sanctification over a six-to-twelve-month period.

Ten diagnostic questions:

1. **Do you thirst for God?** — Is there an active, deep desire to know God more intimately, or does your soul feel dry and complacent?
2. **Are you governed increasingly by God's Word?** — Is your life, worldview, and daily decision-making truly ruled by biblical truth?
3. **Are you more loving?** — Is your capacity to love God and love others growing in a tangible, Christ-like way?
4. **Are you more sensitive to God's presence?** — Do you live with an acute, daily awareness of His presence, purpose, and promptings?
5. **Do you have a growing concern for the spiritual and temporal needs of others?** — Are you genuinely moved to action by both the physical poverty and the spiritual lostness of people around you?
6. **Do you delight in the Bride of Christ?** — Do you possess a sincere love for and commitment to the local church, despite its human flaws?
7. **Are the spiritual disciplines increasingly important to you?** — Are personal habits like prayer, Bible meditation, worship, and fasting becoming foundational to your routine?
8. **Do you still grieve over sin?** — Do you remain deeply sensitive to your own personal failures and shortcomings, rather than becoming hardened to them?
9. **Are you a quicker forgiver?** — Are you willing to extend grace and drop resentments quickly when others wrong you?
10. **Do you yearn for heaven and to be with Jesus?** — Is your primary focus set on eternal reality and ultimate fellowship with Christ, rather than being entirely consumed by this world?

3. **The Results of Spiritual Examination:** If you do this consistently well, this practice cultivates and creates for your soul and life the following qualities:
    a. Humility: in which all the other godly traits will grow
        i. You will realize how much you fall short of God's glory; Isaiah 6; that all my righteousness is as filthy rags; my deep sinfulness
        ii. Forgiveness alone makes this conversation possible; grace alone allows me even to ask and hear the answers and to know God
        iii. "The more conscious I am about what God has yet to do in me, the less critical I become about what God has yet to do in others."

    b. Confidence: taking spiritual inventory has an intrinsic, helpful reward on its own
        i. I am already accepted freely into the beloved by God's grace
        ii. It is finished... Romans 8:1; No fear in judgment... perfect love casts out fear - I have failed, but Jesus was counted as a failure for me!
        iii. Frees me up to be complete without fear of eternal rejection. (See 2 Cor. 5:21)
        iv. And God has promised to finish the work as I obey and cooperate with His Spirit in my life

    c. Direction: What shall we do until then? How do we wait well? 1 Thess. 4 and 5 are probably addressing what the Thessalonians lacked in their faith.
        i. Jeremiah 6:16; 1 Thess. 5:23-25

Conclusion: When we go honestly and humbly to God's Word and start asking these questions, we are communing with God. In the process of doing this, since you have faith, the interaction and engagement strengthen you because it brings us into contact with God. We get time with Him.

Other Sample Resources for the discipline of personal spiritual evaluation:

Urgent Questions: In light of Titus 3:9: "Shun foolish controversies . . . they are unprofitable and worthless"

1. Do I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?
2. Am I being renewed in the spirit of my mind?
3. Am I walking after the Spirit?
4. Am I growing in grace?
5. Do I adorn the doctrine of the Gospel of God in every respect?
6. Am I looking for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ as a good servant should?

Tim Keller on Marriage . .

When both partners decide to treat their own selfishness and self-centeredness as the primary problem in the marriage—rather than focusing on or magnifying the flaws of the other—it creates the foundation for a truly great marriage.

From his book ***The Meaning of Marriage***, Timothy Keller outlines why this shift transforms a relationship:

- **Complete Access and Responsibility:** You only have complete access to and responsibility for your own heart and actions. Trying to fix your spouse's selfishness is impossible, whereas examining and rooting out your own is within your control.
- **Rejecting the "Truce-Marriage":** Without this mindset, couples often fall into a defensive standoff or "truce-marriage," where both partners keep score, excuse their own flaws due to past hurts, and build resentment.
- **Taking Ownership Regardless:** Each spouse commits to working on their own self-centeredness *regardless* of what the other person is doing. When both partners adopt this posture of humility and self-sacrifice—modeled after the Gospel—the dynamic shifts from "about me" to mutual care and thriving

Andy Stanley: Ten questions to diagnose the heart

1. Is everything OK in your heart?
2. Are you mad at anybody?
3. Are you waiting on anyone to come to you and make things right?
4. Have you had any imaginary conversations with anybody lately?
5. Have you secretly celebrated somebody's failure?
6. Do things regularly come out of your mouth that you have to apologize for?
7. Do you have any secrets?
8. Is anything going on that you're afraid somebody will ask you about?
9. Have you recently lied to someone that you love?

In his book ***Enemies of the Heart*** **and corresponding sermon series**, pastor Andy Stanley actually shares **six bedside diagnostic questions** (often grouped with general heart-monitoring metrics) designed to assess emotional and spiritual health. [1, 2, 3]

Stanley teaches that everything we do flows from the heart (Proverbs 4:23) and that four specific monsters destroy it from the inside out: **Guilt, Anger, Greed, and Jealousy**. To diagnose whether these entities are controlling your life, he recommends evaluating your heart using the following framework. [1, 2]

Originally established as a habit for checking in on his children's internal health, these **six diagnostic questions** serve as a direct gauge to expose hidden resentment, anxiety, or unconfessed wrongs: [1]

1. **"Is everything okay in your heart?"** (The baseline diagnostic test)
2. **"Are you mad at anybody?"** (Tests for hidden **Anger**)
3. **"Did anybody hurt your feelings today?"** (Catches wounded pride or resentment)
4. **"Did anybody break a promise to you today?"** (Identifies areas where you feel "owed" a debt)
5. **"Are you worried about anything?"** (Exposes a lack of trust or fear fueling **Greed**)
6. **"Is there anything you need to tell me?"** (Unpacks unconfessed **Guilt**)

Diagnosing the 4 "Enemies of the Heart"

To expand these into a full self-assessment, Stanley highlights four primary debt-debtor dynamics that alter your behavior. You can diagnose them by asking yourself these four core questions: [1]

Heart Enemy	The Internal Lie	The Diagnostic Focus	The Cure
Guilt	*"I owe you."*	Do you carry secrets, avoid certain people, or try to overcompensate for past actions?	**Confess:** Bring it to light and take responsibility.

Anger	*"You owe me."*	Are you waiting for an apology, keeping score, or taking out your frustration on innocent bystanders?	**Forgive:** Cancel the debt they cannot pay.
Greed	*"I owe me."*	Are you holding tightly to finances or resources out of a fear that there won't be enough for you?	**Give:** Loosen the grip of fear through generous stewardship.
Jealousy	*"God owes me."*	Do you secretly celebrate when others fail or feel bitter when they succeed?	**Celebrate:** Publicly praise the accomplishments of others.

The ultimate test Stanley suggests for adult heart health is to **ask the person closest to you what they see in your heart**, as our words and everyday reactions inevitably broadcast our internal condition to those around us.