

**Message: Meet God Where You Are**

**What’s the best thing we can do to grow spiritually as a person and as a congregation?** The best answer I have heard is from theologian Dallas Willard: “You must arrange your days so that you are experiencing deep contentment, joy and confidence in your everyday life with God.”<sup>1</sup> That’s the start to a healthy life.

**Being healthy starts from the inside, with our soul, our spirit.**

“We don’t find that in books, programs or prayer systems. The most important thing we can give to each other is the same thing we give to God. It’s the person we become. When we have a healthy soul, we can’t resist loving and caring for others. If our soul is unhealthy, we can’t help anybody. That would be like sending a doctor with pneumonia to care for patients with immune disorders.”<sup>2</sup>

**You are responsible for the well-being of your own soul.**

**Now you’re probably thinking the same thing I am:** “Well, I have a quiet time when I read the Bible and do daily devotions. I’m doing my best to start each day that way.”

**Reading the Bible, prayer and quiet time are good.** But we often feel great guilt because we fail to have regular quiet time or daily devotions. And, even when we do, we may find that our spirit is uneasy. If you’re like me, the problem isn’t the first 30 minutes of the day. It’s the other twenty-three hours and thirty minutes. We need to arrange our days so we’re experiencing total contentment, joy and confidence in our everyday life with God.

**How can we do that?** Speaking from experience, work isn’t going well enough. I feel inadequate as a pastor, husband, son and brother. I’m carrying burdens that I’m not sure how to let go and I’ll have to feel pain when that doesn’t go well.

**Does this ring a bell with anyone?**

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<sup>1</sup> John Ortberg, *Soul Keeping*, Zondervan, 2014, p.89

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

**There’s an important distinction to keep in mind.** Total contentment, joy and confidence don’t come from our competence or skill or the successful circumstances of our lives. The only way is to experience God everyday in your life. That alone is what makes our soul healthy. It’s not your spouse’s job. It’s not your pastor’s job. It’s not your children’s job. It’s not your friend’s job. It’s YOUR job.

**Class 101 of spirituality is this: there’s a law of consequences.**

Paul says it this way, “*You reap what you sow*” (Galatians 6:7). When we interact with our soul in our everyday life, we’re actually waking our spirit up. One of the best ways to do that is to use your spiritual gifts. It’s like picking up a musical instrument and trying it out. Or trying your hand at gardening or working on cars or crafts or writing or working with people. We aren’t very good when we start. We make mistakes. And it hurts a bit. But we learn and we grow. Our soul gets healthier. And we find greater contentment, joy and confidence when we experience God in that way.

**Three weeks ago, we began talking about our spiritual gifts.**

These aren’t just abstract aspects of our body, mind or being. They are supernatural gifts given to us by God to help others. When we use our gifts, we experience God in the Holy Spirit, who prompts, teaches and encourages us, giving us the strength and power we need.

**We’re using an acronym, SHAPE, which was developed by Pastor Rick Warren.** SHAPE stands for Spiritual Gifts, Heart, Abilities, Personality and Experience. When we understand our spiritual gifts and how we’re made, we have a better idea of how we are uniquely able to serve and experience God each day.

**Today, we are going to consider two questions related to abilities and personality:**

- What natural talents and skills do I have?
- Where does my personality best suit me to serve?

**God has given you incredible strengths. Do you know that?**

Sadly, that’s not the case for a lot of people. They feel overwhelmed by the burdens they’re carrying or trapped by their circumstances. For

example, parents with children feel like they have no time and little to offer. Between cooking, cleaning, shuttling kids from home to school to activities, and work, they have a 24x7 assignment. You want to experience God and use your spiritual gifts, but you can't fit one, more thing into your day.

**Let me invite you to do an exercise this week.** Take the Abilities survey we provided today and go through it. Figure out what your top 5 abilities are. Let's agree to one thing up front, though. When we talk about abilities, there are three levels:

- What you love to do ← our goal
- What you like to do ← we all end up with some of these
- What you can live without ← try to eliminate or share these.

**I want you to focus on the things you love to do.** Those things make work seem like play. Then look at your commitments and see where you could use your gifts for God at this time in your life. Maybe it's spending more time encouraging or listening or reading. If you want to do it and find more joy in your life, you can.

**The point isn't about whether you are accomplishing your ultimate purpose for God right now.** It's about becoming who God made you to be. And, when we make little deposits of God's love in other people's lives, we've making deposits with God and our own soul at the same time. “The difference between an ordinary day and an extraordinary day is not so much what you do, but who you do it for.”<sup>3</sup>

**Give it a try. You'll see benefits.**

**I want to shift gears a little bit and talk about personality.**

Our personality can be described as our unique character, temperament or disposition. Our personality dictates how we interact with others.

**Let's explore this a bit. How would you describe yourself?**

- Outgoing or reserved
- Self-expressive or self-controlled
- Cooperative or competitive

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<sup>3</sup> Erik Rees, S.H.A.P.E., Zondervan, 2006, p. 69

**We are often a blend** (somewhere in the middle). For example, I’m a extroverted introvert who has moderate self-control with a competitive edge. That means I enjoying being with people and get energy from them, but need times of reflection to recharge my batteries. I share my emotions on occasion, but hold some things back. I’m generally cooperative, but find myself enjoying friendly competition.

**What are you like?**

**Each of us is unique. There’s no “right” or “wrong.”** Serving in ministry doesn’t require one particular type of person. In fact, we need all kinds of personalities to balance the church and give it flavor. We relate to one another in different ways. This is helpful for us to understand, particularly during those times when we find ourselves thinking the world would be easier or more satisfying if only people were more like us.

**God didn’t create other people to please us.** God didn’t create us to please other people. God created all people to please God. God created us to relate differently, feel differently, react differently and respond to life differently. We don’t have to be outgoing and unreserved to be successful. We don’t have to conform to the expectations of others in order to feel we have accomplished something worthwhile in our lives. God loves you. And God made you to become who you will be.

**Let’s consider a second question: How do you respond when you are given an opportunity to serve God?** Do you prefer:

- **High risk or low risk** – do you like change or stability?
- **People or process/projects** – are you a people person or a behind the scenes person?
- **Follow or lead** – do you like to follow a good leader or take charge?
- **Teamwork or going solo** – do you like to work with large groups, or maybe you prefer small groups or working alone?
- **Routine or variety** – do you like well defined activities with clear expectations or are you the kind of person who likes to have a hand in many different projects?

**There’s no “one size fits all” answer.** We’re each uniquely made and gifted to respond to the opportunities to use our gifts in our everyday life. That’s how we experience God.

**Here’s an illustration: farmers don’t just go out to harvest one kind of produce.** They gather the fruit of the harvest based on the type of seed sown for that season. The same is true for us. When we’re experiencing God in our everyday lives, we find out that the way we respond to the opportunities to pour God’s love into other people’s lives bears different kinds of fruit – in their lives and in ours!

**Paul gave encouraging words to a congregation in need saying,**  
*“... we are God’s masterpiece. God has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things God planned for us long ago”*  
(Ephesians 2:10).

**Too often we settle for lesser opportunities and lives that are unsettled and lacking in joy.** God has made us for great opportunities. So let’s embrace our spiritual gifts, follow our passion and put our natural skills to work as we relate to other people and share God’s love. When you do, you’ll find you are more content, filled with joy more often, and you’ll be more confident in your life. That’s because you’ll begin to see and experience God in every hour of your day.

**I don’t know about you, but that’s how I want to live! Lord, show us who we’re becoming by your love.**

**Let us pray...**

*“Dear God, you call us to give ourselves to others. And, by doing so, we give ourselves to you. Give us the courage to use our abilities and skills in your name. Make us more comfortable with who we are, how we relate to others and the way we see opportunities. Help us to experience you throughout the day. Show us that all things are possible with Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.”*

**Psalm 139:1-14 (CEB)**

LORD, you have examined me.

You know me.

You know when I sit down and when I stand up.

Even from far away, you comprehend my plans.

You study my traveling and resting.

You are thoroughly familiar with all my ways.

There isn't a word on my tongue, LORD,

that you don't already know completely.

You surround me - front and back.

You put your hand on me.

That kind of knowledge is too much for me;

it's so high above me that I can't fathom it.

Where could I go to get away from your spirit?

Where could I go to escape your presence?

If I went up to heaven, you would be there.

If I went down to the grave, you would be there too!

If I could fly on the wings of dawn,

stopping to rest only on the far side of the ocean -

even there your hand would guide me;

even there your strong hand would hold me tight!

If I said, “The darkness will definitely hide me;

the light will become night around me,”

even then the darkness isn't too dark for you!

Nighttime would shine bright as day,

because darkness is the same as light to you!

You are the one who created my innermost parts;

you knit me together while I was still in my mother's womb.

I give thanks to you that I was marvelously set apart.

Your works are wonderful - I know that very well..

**Hebrews 4:12-16 (CEB)**

... God’s word is living, active, and sharper than any two-edged sword. It penetrates to the point that it separates the soul from the spirit and the joints from the marrow. It’s able to judge the heart’s thoughts and intentions. No creature is hidden from it, but rather everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of the one to whom we have to give an answer.

Also, let’s hold on to the confession since we have a great high priest who passed through the heavens, who is Jesus, God’s Son; because we don’t have a high priest who can’t sympathize with our weaknesses but instead one who was tempted in every way that we are, except without sin.

Finally, let’s draw near to the throne of favor with confidence so that we can receive mercy and find grace when we need help.

**Hebrews 4:12-16 (The Message)**

God means what he says. What he says goes. His powerful Word is sharp as a surgeon’s scalpel, cutting through everything, whether doubt or defense, laying us open to listen and obey. Nothing and no one is impervious to God’s Word. We can’t get away from it - no matter what.

Now that we know what we have - Jesus, this great High Priest with ready access to God - let’s not let it slip through our fingers. We don’t have a priest who is out of touch with our reality. He’s been through weakness and testing, experienced it all - all but the sin. So let’s walk right up to him and get what he is so ready to give. Take the mercy, accept the help.