

## EQUIPPING, OCTOBER 08, 2025-SPIRITUAL VITALITY

We are spiritual beings, with a soul, emotions and feelings, all housed in a physical body. And in this 'information-overload' world we live in there is all kinds of information out there to help us live healthy lives physically, mentally and emotionally. And that's all good.

The 'experts' in these fields have created *assessments and tools* so we can measure our emotional health, mental health and physical health, and see if we need to make any *adjustments or changes* to live healthy and vibrant lives.

Now we have a bit more difficulty measuring our physical condition because we have a tendency to judge our physical condition on how we look.

Oh man I could be that before model on those before-and-after advertisements. We look in the mirror. The mirror doesn't lie. And we judge if we are physically fit on what the mirror is telling us.

But, being in strong physical condition, or looking like you are not in strong physical condition, is not always an indicator that you are actually in good physical condition.

Listen, all of us have either known someone who is an exercise fanatic and runs 100 miles a week, who run marathons; or works out so hard they look like Jack Reacher, and they end up dropping dead of a heart attack.

So we cannot judge our physical condition on externals, which is why our health specialists have a set of *assessments and tests* that they run INTERNALLY to help us gauge our physical condition.

What's true in the natural is also very true in the spiritual. You cannot judge a person's spiritual vitality by how they present, because we are all really good at being an act. That's why Paul encourages us in Romans 12:9 to *never play the role of an actor wearing a mask*.

We seem to be really impressed with the giftings, callings and ministries that we see in the lives of people, but I would really encourage you to be way more impressed with the nature and character of Jesus you see in peoples gifts; be way more impressed with the nature and character of Jesus you see in someone instead of their gifts and callings.

I have seen many, many people destroy their gifts and ministry with poor character.

God can add gifting in seconds but Godly character takes years and years of making right choices and years of surrendering and yielding to the Spirit of A g God.

So we create *assessments, tools and measurements*, to assist us in gauging our emotional, mental and physical health, but have you noticed there is nothing out there on how to determine and measure our *spiritual health*, or our *spiritual vitality*?

And that is what I want to talk about tonight. How to measure our spiritual vitality.

The dictionary defines 'spiritual vitality' as- *a passionate zest for living a life exactly like Jesus*.

So, we are going to attempt to measure our spiritual vitality, our *passionate zest for living a life exactly like Jesus* in four areas. How would I assess my

- #1 Pursuit of closeness, friendship and intimacy with the Lord.
- #2 My absolute surrender to trust in Jesus in the tests and trials of life
- #3 The level of hope I live in, in the 'in-between' moments of life
- #4 The level of authentic love vs. humanistic love I live in  
How much of our love is serving, compared to self-serving?

If you will take this time seriously with the Holy Spirit and be honest with yourself, you can have a really accurate assessment of your spiritual vitality.

#1--Okay, the first assessment on your personal spiritual vitality exam is all about your pursuit of the Lord. On a scale of 1-5, how would you assess your pursuit of *intimacy and friendship* with the Lord?

In Psalm 27:4-David writes: *One thing I have desired of the Lord, that I will seek, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord*.

King David, who was incredibly rich. He had so many resources at his disposal, and so many options in life, and he reduced everything down to one thing. *The 'one-thing' I desire more than any other thing, is to be in the Presence of my beloved simply beholding him*.

Notice it wasn't just being the Presence of his beloved, but it was 'beholding' him. Behold means: *let this man have an impact on your psyche*. This is all about a refined focus.

It is way more than just a consciousness of God. It is setting aside time to be with the Lord, with no other agenda than to just be with him, to just enjoy him. You are not coming into the Presence with anything. You are leaving all your requests, your worries, your mindsets of the things you struggle with-behind you.

You come in, in complete innocence and you immediately come under this deep sense of being loved. This is where you experience the kisses of the Lord that are better than wine. This is the place where you taste and see that the Lord is good.

This is where you are overwhelmed as you realize you are the object of the extreme affection and love of God, and you just drink it all in. This is what you were created for.

You and I were created in the image of God for the purpose of intimacy. Intimacy is defined as a hunger for closeness.

The Lord hungers for closeness with you and I. The Lord has this passion to hang out with you all the time because not only does he love you, he actually likes you.

I don't know how you are going to assess yourself in this particular virtue, but even as I was putting these thoughts together I was overwhelmed with a sense of how the Lord is just longing for us to draw near to him.

I want to encourage you to right now close your eyes for just a moment and listen to God's heart for you.

*That tugging on your heart for more of Me, I put it there. That desperation in your heart for a deeper abiding in Me, I put it there. That hunger to experience greater levels of love. That's Me. That is my longing, my passion and my desire for you, as well.*

*There is nothing you have to do, except respond. Turn your heart of affections towards me and I will flood you with my love, my passion, my hope, my desire for you, and when that passion floods your heart, you will respond by releasing that passion back to me. That's how it works beloved. Simply, let yourselves be loved.*

Any sense of an increased desire or longing for closeness you might be sensing is because the Holy Spirit birthed that in you. We cannot work up, or muster up a passion for the Lord.

Passion for the Lord only comes as you experience his passion for you, and that passion ignites your heart with a passion for him. And you release that passion towards him, and it rocks him and he releases it right back, and that's how it grows.

If you are not sensing a 'renewed hunger' for the Lord, it may be because you MAY have allowed 'things', like apathy, hurt, offense, pride or woundedness to cause your heart to become cold.

Those things have the ability to block the voice of the Lord right now, because I can promise you, He is saying, *Come! Come closer Beloved!*

So, that is the first place you can access your spiritual vitality. How would you rate, on a scale of 1-5, your pursuit of Jesus? Is it 'vibrant', full of energy and excitement?

Now the next three assessments or measurements will all come out of one verse, 1 Corinthians 13:13 from *The Message Bible*:

*Right now, we have three things to do to lead us forward: Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly and love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love.*

So we will take those three things, *trust, hope and love* in order.

#2-Okay, *Trust steadily in God*: the SECOND assessment of your spiritual vitality is the virtue of trust.

I want to look at this subject of trust in what I am calling the *in-between* moments of life. How do you assess your spiritual vitality when you find yourself stuck in an 'in-between' moment, or season.

Ya know, in between prayer and answered prayer?

In between prayers for healing and the healing?

In between those things you are longing for and the fulfillment

In between praying for a breakthrough and experiencing the breakthrough?

Are you living in trust? Are you living in hope?

How is your level of joy in those: 'in-between' times?

Now, even asking about joy in those 'in-between moments, especially if they go on for a long time seems like a ridiculous question.

I don't know about you, but personally, when I think of the things that bring me the greatest joy in life, *crisis-events, delays, tests and trials* are not really on my list,

However according to the Apostle Paul, they should be. He says that those are the moments we can discover the greatest joy possible. He says in James 1:2-8: *My fellow believers, when it seems as though you are facing nothing but difficulties, see it as an invaluable opportunity to experience the greatest joy that you can!*

Whenever I read Scripture that encourages me to shift my thinking, or to take on a new posture that is so different then my normal posture, it challenges me to do a deeper study on what the Lord is saying.

My posture in tests and trials, especially if I am living in things I do not like or understand is not joy. It is often the opposite of that.

But apparently it is an opportunity to experience great joy. So I need to work through this and see what I am missing.

One of the best ways I know how to do that is to do a 'word-study', to break down various words in the context of these verses. Let's start with the word 'trials'.

As you study this word out it suddenly becomes very interesting, because the word 'trials' is the exact same Greek word that's translated 'temptation'.

So you might ask, *Well, how do I know if it's a trial or a temptation?*  
It's a good question.

First of all, both trials and temptations are a test.

Deuteronomy 8:2 tells us that all the tests from God that we find ourselves in are for us, so that we can see what's in our heart. God already knows, so the test is for us.

NOW, the way you determine if something is a test or a trial is based on two things: Who is the source of this circumstance and what is the intent of this circumstance?

When the source and intent of something you are going through is God, it is a trial.

When the source and intent of something you are going through is the evil one, it is a temptation.

When the intent is to see you become more like Jesus, it is a trial

When the intent is to kill, rob and destroy you, it is a temptation.

When God allows events and circumstances into your life that he could have easily prevented by his power, part of the intent of is for us to use those circumstances as a vehicle to take us into that internal castle where the Holy Spirit abides.

And from that place we connect with and surrender to the Spirit of the Lord, and see more and more of the character and nature of God developed within you during this time.

His intent is to be someone for us in this moment is to reveal to us a part of who he is that he could never be outside of this moment.

His intent is to make you *bigger, better and stronger*.

The intent of the enemy in a trial is to turn it into a temptation.

When you are going through crisis events, difficult moments, the in-between times, if you go to the ALTAR OF HUMAN REASONING to figure out what is going on, you will be influenced by the enemy.

When you use every opposition as a vehicle to get into your inner man you will silence the voice of the enemy, because you are in that 'secret-place' with the Lord, and this is the place where the fruit of the Spirit, God's nature, *love, faith, patience, goodness, self-control* is developed in you.

When you take on opposition in your soul, in your mind, in your emotions, in your 'how-is-this-impacting-me-now realm. you will discover more of the fruit of your soul is developed in you; *anger, fear, frustration, offense and you become more of an act*.

The goal of the enemy is for you to question what God is doing, and to turn that TRIAL into a temptation. And one of the ways he does it is to say:

*Gary, what is happening in your life is not right; if God is soooo good as you are always saying. If God is so for you, then why is this happening in your life? Why is this not happening in your life? God is not for you in this. You need to do something about this yourself. You don't have to go through all this, here's a way of escape.*

And sometimes, in the in-between moments, that sounds like a really good plan, and we allow a trial of the Lord to be turned into a temptation.

We have a great example of this entire process in the Gospels when we are told Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert for a time of extended testing, and after 40 days of fasting, the enemy came to attempt to turn that trial into a temptation.

Now, remember, Jesus was fully human. He has not eaten in 40 days. He is starving. And then the tempter says, *If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.*

Now, if that's me, I'm probably tuning into my soul. I'm probably saying, heck yeah, let's eat.

The devil is saying to Jesus, you have a real need here Jesus. You are famished, and by the way, your father isn't meeting that need, so you need to take your life into your own hands and become your own supplier. There is the opportunity to turn this trial into a temptation.

A trial shows you the way through, and the temptation shows you the way out without going through.

It is all about the 'posture and position' of your heart in times of difficulty, tests and trials.

Now one of the ways you can tell if you have turned a trial into a temptation is by the fruit of your life you are experiencing, because at some point the fruit of the soul will begin to manifest itself-*anxiety, stress*-and you will discover that you are going around the same mountain again, recognizing the same signposts.

But don't worry-as a friend told us years ago, you cannot fail a test of God, you just get to take it over, again and again, and again, until you start to pass them.

So that's the second assessment on your spiritual vitality: How are you doing in the 'in-between' moments?

#3: The THIRD assessment we will cover tonight on your spiritual vitality is the virtue of hope: *hope unswervingly*

The one thing that the 'in-between' moments have the capability of doing, is robbing you of hope. I'm just going to look at one key in holding onto UNSWERVING HOPE: Never forget Romans 8:28-29:

*All things work together for good, to those who love God and are called according to His purpose.* Often we stop there, but we need to go to the next verse, verse 29 because that tells us the purpose:

*29-For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.* All things work together for good because all things are conforming us into the nature and character of God. We are Christ-followers becoming more and more like Christ.

Imagine Jesus looking at you face to face, nose to nose, mouth to mouth, eye to eye, saying, This is my promise to you. *I will use every situation that you ever face as an opportunity for good. I will use it to strengthen you and to make you more and more like me. I will empower you in this moment. I'll use it for my glory and for your strength. You have that kind of a covenantal promise.*

That promise gives me permission to HOPE.

Remember, true biblical hope is the joyful anticipation of the striking-through of good and God into my situation.

I am so certain that God is going to strike through with good that I am experiencing the joy of that breakthrough right now.

If you lost 'hope' in some circumstance, it may be that you have forgotten that COVENANTAL PROMISE from God that: All things, all things, work together for good, to those who love me.

Listen, if I truly believe that all things work together for good in my life, then I can look at any trial I'm facing, then hope and joy are the only logical responses.

So, our third assessment on our spiritual vitality on a scale of 1-5, how are you doing in hoping and trusting in the Lord in challenging issues.

#4-Okay, the FOURTH and final assessment for tonight on our spiritual vitality test is the virtue of LOVE. We are to love extravagantly!

The dictionary defines 'extravagant' as lacking restraint, exceeding what is reasonable.

When Jesus was asked which commandment was the greatest commandment he replied: *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind and all your strength, and love your neighbor, like you would want to be loved yourself.*

He said, on those two things hang all the law and all the prophets.

He reduced the Bible down to two verses.

That's how simple God wants us to think.

Love me.

Love you.

Love everyone around you.

Now when they asked Jesus, what's the greatest of all the commandments he wasn't choosing from only the original ten, because the people who were entrusted with these commandments came to the conclusion that the ten were not enough, so they added a few more.

They ended up with at least 613 different laws that they had to obey to please God.

And not only did Jesus reduce that number, he says if you live out this one law, love, love, love all the rest of them will take care of themselves.

Then Jesus said, love is what will identify you as my follower. In John 13:34-35 he says, *A new command, I give you. Love one another as I have loved you. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples if you have love, one for the other.*

Now, this seems like it would be so simple, all we need to do is love each other. Yet human history and our current world situations proves this is our most difficult endeavor.

We don't seem to be that great at loving.

We seem to be way better at *anger, hatred and violence.*

I don't know how it happened, but at some point the church stopped being a place of love, hope and healing, and became the epicenter of condemnation and judgment.

Listen, Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:20 that Christ-followers are 'ambassadors' of Christ and the Kingdom of God. An 'ambassador' is an 'authorized representative'. Which means, when we identify ourselves as Christ-followers, we are saying, when you look at me, you can discern what Jesus looks like and what his kingdom looks like.

And when you are full of *care, compassion, love, goodness, kindness*-you are showing people what God looks like. But when you are *critical, judgmental, or love with conditions*, you are declaring, that's what my God looks like, and our culture is longing to see true Kingdom culture, true Jesus love that is not hypocritical.

I am so grateful that there is a hunger that is rising up, that there are true Christ-followers who are rising up and loving people and truly demonstrating what loving our neighbor looks like.

*So, why is it so difficult for us to love one another? Well, maybe it's because we use the word 'love' for so many things that the word has lost its essence.*

The Greek language has a number of words for 'love', the English language has one. We use the same word 'love' for a lot of things.

We love our cappuccinos, and our dark chocolate.

We love our streak and our french-fries.

We love pizza and donuts and In and Out burgers, ice-cream and being skinny.

We love our partner, our husband/our wives, our family and our dogs and cats.

And we use the same word for all of them.

Now in John 15:13, Jesus reclaims this word when we read: *Greater love has no one than this to lay down one's life for a friend.*

And in 1 John, John writes: *Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. This is how we know what love is.*

This is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.

And by the way we ought to lay down our lives for one another.

We thought we knew what love was, but in this verse John defines love for us: Love looks like sacrifice.

Wouldn't it be amazing if we only spoke of loving someone when it's not about what I GET, but what I get to give?

You see, when Jesus showed up and people encountered his love, they were stunned. They had never experienced a love like that, and they had no word in their language to describe it, so they made up a new one. They called it *Agape*.

Agape love is absolute, unconditional love. It is a love that is always available and is not based on circumstances, actions or receptivity. If we are born-again Christ-followers that is the love that now lives inside of us.

Before we 'invited' Jesus into our life we lived in 'humanistic' love.

Humanistic love is **CONDITIONAL** love.  
It is loving for my own personal advantage.

What's in it for me? What do I get out of this thing?  
What are you going to do for me?

Humanistic love is self-centered, self-consuming, and self-referential.  
It's a highly refined form of self-interest and self-seeking.

Humanistic love is loving with a hook. Now you may get blessed by my 'love', but the bottom line is, I am the most important person in this transaction.

Humanistic love is loving with an 'investment mentality'. *I am going to invest my love here, but I am expecting a certain level of return on this investment and if I do not get that return or better then I am going to adjust that investment or withdraw it.*

You may have heard this said before, and you may have been the one saying it: *I have done so much for them. I have given and given, above and beyond, and they have never reciprocated. I don't even think they said thank you. I'm done.*

That is a manifestation of humanistic love. There was love given, but given with an expectation of some return on that love.

Sometimes, when we think we love someone, actually what we love most is what that person can give us or do for us. If for any reason that changes, then our relationship could be adjusted to reflect our disappointment or even bewilderment.

That is the love that we lived by, and then when we invited Jesus into our life, Agape came in and it is the desire of the Lord that his love so dominates our life that all traces of humanistic love is pushed out.

When it comes to love, that is our journey. As we surrender and yield more and more of our lives to Jesus, the more of his love fills us and we begin to love like Jesus.

So, being honest with yourself, how to rate out on love on a scale of 1-5?

Here's a test: how do you love someone who has hurt or wounded you?  
How do you love someone when that love is not returned?

If we are going to rate ourselves high in this category then the answer to that question is: I will love that person exactly the same as if it were returned.

In Luke 6:27-28, we are told to: *Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you and pray for those who spitefully use you.*

Let me give you a key to loving those who hate you , or curse you , or spitefully use you: *Pray for those who spitefully use you.* PRAY FOR THEM. IN A POSITIVE WAY.

When you have someone you're really mad at, or offended with, it is way more important to pray for them than it is to talk about them.

Because, you may not like that person, but God does.

God loves that person. So when you pray for someone that you don't like, or you are mad at and you involve God, you have now triangulated the relationship, and God is going to impart his love inside you for that person.

Now, if we are being honest with ourselves the reason we do not pray for people that we are mad at, because they betrayed us, hurt us, offended us or wounded us, is because we know that if we pray we get God involved, he is going to do that whole love thing that he does.

If you want God involved then get ready to love your enemy.

Get ready to love the person who betrayed you, hurt you, offended you and wounded you.

If you don't want love to consume your life, don't get God involved.  
Because God only has one way of dealing with everything.  
That's the way of love.

IN THIS JOURNEY WITH GOD I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN CONVINCED THAT MY JOURNEY WILL BE SEEING MORE AND MORE AND MORE OF THE AGAPE LOVE OF GOD TAKE OVER MY

LIFE AND SHOVE OUT THE HUMANISTIC LOVE OF GOD OUT OF MY LIFE, UNTIL I AM LOVING 100% LIKE GOD LOVES.

So, the final assessment tonight: How are you doing in this journey of loving like Jesus?

Four Assessments on your spiritual vitality. On a scale of 1-5, how are you doing:

- In your energetic and excited pursuit of Jesus?
- How are you doing with your trust and surrender the 'in-between' moments?
- How are you doing in hoping and trusting in the Lord in challenging issues?
- How are you doing in this journey of loving like Jesus?

