

EXPERIENCING SPIRITUAL REALITY IN HUMAN EXPERIENCE

INTRODUCTION

A. Questions

1. Philip Yancey, *Is the visible world around us all there is? Does faith delude us into seeing a world that doesn't exist, or does it reveal the existence of a world we cannot see without it?*
2. John Milton in *Paradise Lost*, *What if earth be but the shadow of heaven?*

B. Convictions

1. C. S. Lewis, *Our longing is for intimacy with God... What we want is what we were created to have. To be who we were created to be. To live and laugh and love with the One who created us to do all of that - and more!*
2. Chardin, *We are not human beings having a spiritual experience, we are spiritual beings having a human experience.*
3. Oswald Chambers, *It is a bad thing to be satisfied spiritually...we are as close to God as we want to be.*

C. Proposals

1. Many are unsure about God and an invisible world but most feel the longings for something more.
2. Christians have faith in the unseen based on the Word of God and confirmed by a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

D. Let's see what the Bible says about living a spiritual life in a physical world.

SPIRITUAL POINTS OF INTERSECTION

A. Biblical Points of Intersection

1. Jacob, Gen. 28:10-16 - God makes promises
2. Joseph, Mat. 1:18-25 - God gives instructions
3. Saul, Acts 9:1-19 - God selects individuals for service

B. Personal Points of Intersection - Signposts

1. Salvation (out of the shadows and into the light): conviction
2. Discipleship (living in the shadows): dissatisfaction
3. Backsliding (moving back into the shadows): fear of death

COMING OUT OF THE SHADOWS

A. Concerns

1. Emphasis on experience/emotion
 - a. John 4:23, *But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.*
 - b. John 5:39-40, *You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life.*
 - c. A.W. Tozer, *If you are longing after God with the expectation that you are going to be able to think your way through to Him, you are completely mistaken...The promise is that God will fill the heart, or man's innermost being. The Word of God makes it very plain that the Church of Jesus Christ will never operate and minister and prosper by the stock of knowledge in the heads of Christian believers but by the warmth and urgency of God's love and compassing flowing through their beings.*
2. Escapism - *Pie in the sky or so heavenly minded, no earthly good.*
 - a. C. S. Lewis, *Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you get neither.*
 - b. C. S. Lewis, *A continual looking forward to the eternal world is not a form of escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things a Christian is meant to do. It does not mean that we are to leave the present world as it is. If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English evangelicals who abolished the slave trade, all left their mark on earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.*

B. Living in the light of the Son is God's will

1. It is reconnecting to the spiritual.
 - a. The disconnect is sin.
 - b. Reconnecting demands the removal of the barrier of sin which can only come through the work of Jesus Christ.
 - c. Philip Yancey, *Does God really want close contact with us? Jesus gave up Heaven for it. In person he reestablished the original link between God and human beings, between seen and unseen worlds.*
 - d. John 4:23, *But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.*
2. We were made to know Him.
 - a. Augustine, *You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You.*
 - b. John Calvin, *God accommodates Himself to our abilities.*
3. It is accepting God's work by faith, Hebrews 11:1-3, *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.*
 - a. I believe Jesus Christ is God the Son Who died on the cross, was buried and was raised from the dead.
 - b. I believe He died to pay my penalty for sin.
 - c. I place my faith in Christ alone for eternal life and I pass from physical death to spiritual life.
4. It is adoption into the family of God., Ephesians 1:5, *In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will.*

C. Living in the light of the Son is personal

1. It is a living relationship
 - a. It is knowing Him, not just knowing about Him, personal not just intellectual
 - 1) Alister McGrath, *...intellectual assent can easily become a spiritual liability. It led me to think of 'knowing Christ' purely in terms of knowing about Christ...Knowing Christ was nothing more and nothing less than gathering information about Christ.*
 - 2) Jesus wants us to know Him, Rev. 3:20, *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.*
 - 3) We have the ability to know Him, 1 John 5:20, *And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him.*
2. It is a daily choice
 - a. Romans 12:1, *Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.*
 - b. Alister McGrath, *...the closer we draw to Christ, the more conscious we become of our sin.*
 - c. Philippians 3:8, *...I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*
3. It is progressive
 - a. 1 Cor. 13:12, *For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known.*
 - b. *I could summarize my entire spiritual pilgrimage as an effort to move the operating center from myself to God.* Phillip Yancey
 - c. I must continue moving toward the light of the Son and away from darkness.
4. It is identifiable
 - a. Galatians 5:22-23, *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*
 - b. A person living in the light of the Son can be identified by the fruit of the Spirit manifested in one's life.
4. It is awaking to a new life (spiritual reality) in the midst of the old.
 - a. John 5:24, *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*
 - b. Romans 8:6, *For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.*
5. It is for everyone
 - a. A. W. Tozer, *It is not what a man does that determines whether his work is sacred or secular, it is why he does it.*
 - b. Martin Luther, *Even dirty and unpleasant work, such as shoveling manure or washing diapers, is pure and holy work if it comes from a pure heart.*
 - c. One person summarized spirituality as *living the ordinary life extraordinarily well. If we are not spiritual where we are and as we are, we are not spiritual at all.*

6. It is practical, Colossians 3:1-17
 - a. Basic principle found in verses (1-4)
 - 1) Have a lifestyle in keeping with your position in Christ.
 - 2) 2 commands identify a Christian's responsibility - to live out of the shadows.
 - a) Seek heavenly things
 - b) Set your mind on heavenly things
 - b. Means of developing such a lifestyle (5-17)
 - 1) Things to put off (5-11)
 - a) Put to death immoral practices
 - b) Put aside unhealthy attitudes
 - c) Stop lying
 - 2) Things to put on (12-17)
 - a) Godly attitudes and actions
 - b) Peace of Christ
 - c) Thankfulness
 - d) Indwelling Word of God through instruction and worship
 - e) Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. If I do everything with a view toward Heaven, I will move out of the shadows into the light of the Son.

PRACTICAL STEPS FOR LIVING A SPIRITUAL LIFE IN A HUMAN EXPERIENCE
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A. Worship God

1. Tell God you want to worship Him because of Who He is.
 - a. Psalm 95:6, *Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!*
 - b. Hebrews 12:28-29, *let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.*
2. Tell God you want to worship Him because of what He has done.
 - a. 2 Corinthians 5:21, *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*
 - b. John 5:24, *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*
3. Tell God you want to worship Him through obedience.
 - a. John 4:23, *God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.*
 - b. John 9:31, *We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him.*
4. Quotes on worship
 - a. Lucius Annaeus Seneca (50 A.D.), *He who knows God reverences Him.*
 - b. Richard Foster, *If worship does not change us, it has not been worship. To stand before the Holy One of eternity is to change. Worship begins in holy expectancy; it ends in holy obedience.*
 - c. Bernard of Clairvaux (12th C.), *Never despair of finding Him...Seek Him by desire, follow Him through action, and in faith you will find Him.*
 - d. Abraham Heschel, *Worship is a way of living, a way of seeing the world in the light of God . . . to rise to a higher level of existence, to see the world from the point of view of God.*

B. Seek God

1. Study the Bible
 - a. Biblical declarations
 - 1) Proverbs 30:5, *Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.*
 - 2) Matthew 4:4, Jesus said, *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.*
 - 3) Hebrews 4:12, *For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*

- b. Quotes on the Bible
 - 1) Augustine (4th C.), *The Holy Scriptures are our letters from home.*
 - 2) Charles Spurgeon (19th C.), *Nobody ever outgrows Scripture; the book widens and deepens with our years...Each man should use the word of God personally, practically, and habitually, that he may see his way and see what lies in it.*
 - 3) A.W. Tozer, *The sacred page is not meant to be the end, but only the means toward the end, which is knowing God Himself.*
 - 4) Timothy Dwight (18th C.), *The Bible is a window in this prison-world through which we may look into eternity.*
2. Pray like God is listening - He is
 - a. Biblical declarations on prayer
 - 1) Matthew 6:6, *But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*
 - 2) Romans 8:26, *...the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.*
 - 3) 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, *Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*
 - b. Quotes on prayer
 - 1) A. C. Gabelein, *In the Word of God, the Lord speaks to our hearts; in prayer, we speak to Him.*
 - 2) Elton Trueblood, *At the profoundest depths in life, men talk not about God but with him.*
 - 3) Billy Graham, *Prayer is the rope that pulls God and man together. But it doesn't pull God down to us: it pulls us up to Him.*
3. Listen to others who are godly.
 - a. Choose to be under the authority of a local, Bible believing church.
 - b. Seek the counsel of those who walk the talk.
- C. Obey God - put into practice what you learn in worship, Bible study and prayer.
 1. Biblical declarations on obedience
 - a. James 1:22, *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*
 - b. 1 John 2:5, *...but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected.*
 - c. Luke 11:28, *Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it.*
 2. Quotes on obedience
 - a. Mark Twain (19th C.), *It ain't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand.*
 - b. John Owen (17th C.), *He who prays as he ought will endeavor to live as he prays.*
 - c. Oswald Chambers, *It is only by obedience that we understand the teaching of God...We learn more by five minutes' obedience than by ten years' study.*

HOW CAN I KNOW JESUS PERSONALLY
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- A. It is not knowing about Jesus.
 1. I know who Jesus is and what He did for me.
 2. I placed my faith in Jesus alone for eternal life.
 3. But, do I know Him?
 4. Alister McGrath, *...intellectual assent can easily become a spiritual liability. It led me to think of "knowing Christ" purely in terms of knowing about Christ...Knowing Christ was nothing more and nothing less than gathering information about Christ.*
- B. It is knowing Jesus.
 1. Knowing Jesus personally is not simply a formal relationship but a developing fellowship.
 2. Donald Coggan, former archbishop of Canterbury, *The journey from head to heart is one of the longest and most difficult that we know.*
 3. I have had the privilege of being married to my wife for almost 50 years. I know her. The deepness of our relationship is not based on a marriage certificate but on our spending time together. I enjoy being with her. I enjoy pleasing her. I have come to know her not just to know about her.
 4. Michael W. Smith had a song called *Breathe*. He cries out to God, *I'm desperate for You.*
 5. Are you desperate to know Jesus not just to know about Him?

- C. Knowing Jesus is possible.
1. Jesus wants us to know Him, Revelation 3:20, *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.*
 2. We were made to know Him, Augustine, *You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You.*
 3. We have the ability to know Him, 1 John 5:20, *And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him.*
- D. Knowing Jesus takes effort.
1. A.W. Tozer, *Every man is as close to God as he wants to be.*
 2. It is a choice over sin, Alister McGrath, *...the closer we draw to Christ, the more conscious we become of our sin.*
 3. It is a choice of lifestyle, a newfound desire to be part of a local church for encouragement and service.
 4. It is a choice to remember God's goodness, Philipp Melancthon, *To know Christ is to know His benefits.*
- E. Knowing Jesus is forever.
1. John 17:3, *And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*
 2. Revelation 21:3-4, *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."*

CONCLUSION

- A. We can make a difference in this world by living for the next.
2. Luke 10:18, *And He said to them, I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning.*
 3. People are looking for a faith that works. Our faith was not designed to be lived in the shadows.
 3. A. W. Tozer, *The Church will come out of her doldrums when we find out that salvation is not...an insurance policy against hell only, but that it is a gateway into God and that God is all that we would have and can desire.*
- B. Where do you choose to live this day, in the shadows or the light of the Son?
1. Have you never come to the light? Place your trust in Jesus Christ alone - choose life in the light!
 2. Are you living in the shadows instead of the light where you belong? Repent and choose the light, 1 John 1:9-10, *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*
- C. It demands a response of the heart, a desperate desire to know Him, Paul declared in Philippians 3:8, *...I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*
- D. I want a life desperate to know God personally. How about you?
- E. Books that made me think more deeply about this topic
1. Phillip Yancey, *Rumors of Another World: What On Earth Are We Missing?*
 2. St. Augustine, *The City of God.*
 3. Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God.*