

Spiritual Inventory

Check Up

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

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How many of you have ever worked in retail? Raise your hand if you have worked in retail. A little less than first service. When I was in college, I had a job working as the night shift manager at Dunham Sporting Goods in Mishawaka. Now, it was a great job for me during college because it was right across the street from Bethel, so I could walk there and walk back to my dorm room. And my main responsibilities as the night manager included managing the employees, of course, helping customers that came in.

One of the biggest jobs was closing the registers by counting the money at the end of the night and making sure it balanced with the sales, straightening the entire store so it looked nice the following morning, putting out stock, and of course locking up the store at night when we were closed. It wasn't a bad college job, but there were certain things that did wear on me. If I never have to straighten up an aisle of shoe boxes again, I will be okay with that.

Anybody that's ever done that, I am amazed at how big of a mess people can make in a store in one day. I truly believed that there were people that intentionally went in there and just moved things all over the place where they weren't supposed to be, just so I could put them back where they were supposed to be. That did get frustrating after a while. Now, I knew that they were a discount sporting goods store, and so to keep prices down, they did some pretty strange things that I wouldn't expect.

It was not uncommon to receive a shipment with a truck that had boxes on it that were usually, you know, some of them were 5 foot by 5 foot and 3 foot deep, and they were filled with thousands of random items that needed to be put out in the store. No rhyme or reason as to why they were there. It was almost like at the distribution center, they just had all the boxes out, and when things would come in, they would just throw them in the boxes. And so, again, not uncommon, before you knew where things were put in the store, the employee would be walking around with one thing, trying to find out where it went.

Because you couldn't sort them, you didn't know where they were supposed to go. And I truly believe this is where some of my OCD came from, right? Because I was thinking in my head, there's a way better way to do this. But by far, the worst part of the job was yearly inventory. Anybody that's worked in retail and you know about inventory, it was the one time a year that Dunham's corporate wanted to know exactly what products and how many they had in each store.

And again, to keep costs down, they didn't purchase the technology to do this efficiently. We literally went around with pen and paper and had to write down every SKU number of every product that was in the store and how many were physically there. That would have been hard enough if the back room and the store were organized well.

But sometimes, because of how messy it was, I would be crawling around on massive shelving units in the back storeroom, digging through boxes that had stuff in it that was there before I was born, that was covered with

dust, just to keep track of what was in the store. But as horrendous as this was, I truly understood the importance for Dunham's corporate to know how much they had invested in stock in each store.

It was important for corporate to keep track of inventory so they knew what they needed to buy, what wasn't selling, even what was being stolen, and also just to get a general overview of the entire company. Corporate knew that this was going to be a headache for store managers and staff, but the information that they gleaned from those inventories was priceless as they would determine how to move forward.

Today I had a free Sunday in between some series that we're going to do, and I have been wanting to talk with you all about the importance of taking a spiritual inventory. Every once in a while, it is good for us to take a break, turn off the TV, put down our phones, turn off the radio, and spend some time with God and take a spiritual inventory of our lives to truly evaluate where we are at, whether we're a long ways down this path of our Christian life, our walk with Jesus, or even if we're just trying to figure this whole thing out and we're not even sure what we believe.

The problem is, you and I get so busy that we don't take the time to evaluate or consider the direction that we're heading in life. And I can't tell you how often I sit in my office with individuals that ask me the question, "How did I end up here?" And the problem is, we end up at the end of a road we didn't know we were traveling if we don't take time to evaluate. And sometimes, in those situations, it's too late and the decisions have been made.

So I personally have tried to get into the habit of stopping every so often and taking this spiritual inventory. When I do this, it shows me where I'm doing well, but more importantly, it shows me where I am lacking, maybe what I need to work on, and where God is trying to lead me personally. It stops me from going too far down a road that I don't want to be on.

So I want to take some time today to discuss what this might look like for us as we do this, and then encourage you to be available sometime this week in your own time to take a spiritual inventory of your life. Now, before we begin, I want us to understand that the goal of taking a spiritual inventory isn't to find out how good you are doing and so kind of to be inflated with pride of how great of a Christian you are being.

But neither is it to find out how bad you are doing so that you end up beating yourself up. Instead, the goal is to ask, truly ask the question, "God, show me where I am and lead me where you want me to go." That's the general question. Show me where I am, and then show me where you want me to go. The psalmist in Psalm 139, verses 23 and 24, says this: "Search me, O God, and know my heart.

Test me, and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Can I just warn you that is a dangerous prayer. If you want truly to know where your anxiousness is coming, if you want God to test your heart, you can ask this, you can pray this to Him. But I'm telling you from personal experience, the result is not always fun immediately. Because He will point out things where there is growth that is available.

Now, as we begin, I would suggest that you would willingly and honestly ask the question, "What does God see in me that I am unwilling or unable to see?" God, show me things that I'm unwilling or unable to see. And the goal of this entire message, again, is not for you to feel great or to feel bad about yourself. It truly is to help you ask the right questions and encourage you to answer them honestly. So let's pray, and then we will jump into some of these questions.

Heavenly Father, we come before You. Every person here, every person watching online, listening on the radio, Father, we are all at a different spot in our spiritual journey. Some people haven't even begun their spiritual journey and they're just checking things out. There are others here that this is all new and exciting and fresh for them.

Father, there are others here that are a long ways down that journey, but maybe have some areas in their life that you would like to change, you would like to draw out, because you have something in store for them. And so, God, for all of us, wherever we are at, my prayer is that we would be willing to ask the hard questions and then to give honest answers.

Not lie to ourselves, not lie to You, with the goal of being drawn closer, God, so You can use us for Your glory. We ask this in the powerful name of Jesus. Amen. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians, chapter 13, verse 5, to examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves, he says, do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you?

Unless, of course, you fail the test. This should be the very first part of us kind of questioning where we are at. Am I a follower of Jesus Christ? Have I submitted to His Lordship of my life, or have I not? Have I taken that first step of faith? And if I have, Paul says, remember, that means that Christ Jesus is in you. And so the questions that we need to ask as we are trying to answer, "Is Christ in us?" are questions like this: Is Christ really at work in me?

Is my faith genuine, growing, and evident in my life? Is Jesus actually changing me? Is there evidence of Christ in my life? This is the idea of more than just going through the motions. Imagine somebody came up to you and they asked you this question, "How has your relationship with Jesus changed you?" Have you thought about how you would answer that?

How has your relationship with Jesus changed you? And the answers to the question should be deeper than, "Will I go to church on Sunday morning? I read the Bible. I pray." Of course, those are all good things and they're natural things that a follower of Jesus is going to do. But did you know it's possible to do all of those things and still not have faith? You know, there's people that come to church on Sunday morning, they read their Bible, they pray, and yet they do these things outwardly, but inwardly they are no different.

So try to answer that question. How has your relationship with Jesus changed you? By what is happening inside of you, not just by your actions. What internally is different? Maybe your goals, how you view the world, the things that you do or don't do, and why you do or don't do those things. Ask God to reveal your heart, your true heart, not just your actions. The second area that you and I have to check up on often is our priorities.

Jesus says in Matthew, chapter 6, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Jesus tells us that a fantastic way to examine our hearts and our motives is to examine our priorities and to look where our treasure is.

Here are some very difficult questions in this area, ones that we don't often want to ask but are good to evaluate what our priorities are. What does my use of money reveal about where my heart is? Or a step further, what do my time and attention reveal about the longing of my heart? You see, money is valuable to all of us. You need it to live, but there are things that are more valuable than money, and I think that's our time and attention, because those are limited resources.

We only get so much of those. Paul shares his experience with us in his letter to the Philippians as he was working through this idea of priorities. What are his goals in life? And he says this: "But whatever were gains to me, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more? I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.

I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ ." Paul, as he is walking in this spiritual journey, getting to know Jesus, growing in his relationship, says that knowing Jesus, compared to that, everything else in Paul's life is secondary. Nothing is even close to that same level. He actually goes on to refer to it as rubbish or trash or garbage when it stands next to Jesus.

Nothing compares to Jesus. Here is another tough question. If someone looked at my life without hearing my words, would they conclude that knowing Jesus is my highest priority? This is a tough one, isn't it? I think we all have times in our life where we get distracted and other things take priority over our relationship with God. And none of those things are necessarily bad things in and of themselves.

I'm certainly at fault for this. I am sure that there are times in my life that if people were to look at my calendar and they were to look at my time and they were to look at my energy, they would conclude that having green grass with no weeds is more important than my relationship with Jesus, as I'm out there on my hands and knees pulling weeds. There's people that would conclude that woodworking is more important than my relationship with Jesus, as I spend all of my time in my workshop trying to get the next project done.

There's certainly people that would conclude that my love of sports and Michigan sports in general is more important than my relationship with Jesus because of the time and the energy and everything that I'm spending on it. If someone were to look at my life without hearing my words, would they conclude that knowing Jesus is my highest priority? Again, none of those things are wrong. But Paul says, compared to knowing Jesus, they're trash, they're rubbish, they're garbage. They really don't matter.

Unfortunately, as we do this inventory, this spiritual inventory, it's easy to know the right answers to these questions, but it is a completely different thing to live in a way that shows the right answers are inside of us. This helps us transition to our next evaluation, and that's this idea of looking at our fruit. What are we producing? And many of you are familiar with Galatians, chapter 5, verses 22 and 23. We call it the fruit of the Spirit.

Paul says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self - control. And against such things there is no law." Instead of asking the question, "Do I believe the right things?" we should ask the question, "What type of person am I becoming?"

Does my life reflect the fruits of the Spirit?" More specifically, am I becoming more like Jesus? Because these were His characteristics. Am I becoming more loving? Am I becoming more patient? Am I exhibiting more self - control in my life? Am I becoming a more gentle person in how I interact with others? And probably the most difficult question, would the people closest to me say that the fruit of the Spirit is increasing in my life?

That is a dangerous question to ask somebody, isn't it? Because your family, your close friends, they're going to be honest with you. And they're going to say, "You know what? In this one area, yes, you're doing very good, but maybe in this other area it's not great." And again, we aren't asking these questions because we're trying to be perfect. It's because we're trying to grow. We're trying to put in the effort. It means that I have the desire to improve.

So that if somebody does share something with me, if I ask the question and they say, "You know what, Joel, you really don't have a lot of empathy," which is probably true, all right, then I can say, instead of being mad at them and say, "Well, yes, I do. I'm very empathetic," you know? I can say, "You're right. I probably need to work on that in my life. It's something that I need God to work in what I am doing." It means that I want to look different this year than I did last year. Again, I am guilty of this.

I think we all have times in our life where we can look back at the things that we did, the things that we said, and how we acted, and it can just make us cringe. I'm not the only one, right? Things that we've done and we just look back on because God is changing us. He's transforming us. I look back on my life. You know, one of my best friends when I was growing up just happened to be a pastor's kid, and I would go to his house. And so his dad was a pastor, and we would go and we'd stay up late at night and we would watch Jay Leno and David Letterman. I think those were the guys, you know, the late-night shows.

And they could be a little coarse in what they would talk about, and the pastor would just walk by and shake his head, you know? And now I look back on that and I'm going, "Why did I laugh at those things? Why did I watch

those things?" Not that if you watch them you're a horrible person, okay? I'm not trying to convict you. But there's just things that we look back on. And I firmly believe that as I continue to grow in my relationship with Christ, it is very likely that I'm going to look back at things that I do and say and watch now and I'm going to say, "Man, Joel, I can't believe you did that."

You were a pastor of a church, right?" Because God is continuing to work. If the Spirit is living in me, I will produce the Spirit's fruit. But if the Spirit isn't in me, then my fruit will more resemble the world. And let me just tell you, this fruit that we are exhibiting, we don't try to live this way somehow to earn our salvation from God. You guys all understand that, right? Scripture is very clear that you're saved by grace through faith, not by works, so that no one can boast.

What comes first is my changed heart, and then because of my changed heart, my actions now begin to reflect that changed heart. That's the way that it works. This leads us to our next examination. Lamentations, chapter 3, verse 40 says, "Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord ." What are some things in my life that are struggles, that are trials, that are temptations? What do I need to examine and give up to Him?

Here is the difficult question for this examination. Is there something in my life that needs to be rooted out? Think about your personal struggle, the sin that always seems to grab you, the temptation that trips you up. One of the things that you and I need to be aware of is that there is a spiritual world in which we are living. We don't always see it with our eyes.

And here in America, I truly believe that the enemy in that spiritual world, one of the best things that he can do is do his work in the darkness and not in the light, so that people just don't even think he exists. But there is a spiritual battle that is taking place. And if you are not aware, the devil is very wise in knowing what trips you up. He is not all-knowing. He can't be everywhere all the time, but he has been around long enough that he knows where you and I struggle.

And if you think for one moment he's not going to keep pushing those buttons in our life, you're wrong. He's going to keep pushing those. Think about that struggle. Think about that temptation that the enemy constantly uses. And again, pray that God would root that out of your life. The goal of taking this inventory isn't just to make observations. The goal is to move toward change because of the observations. Observing and discovering is the first step.

Again, the goal of taking inventory at Dunham's wasn't just to know what was in the store. The ultimate goal of that inventory was knowing what was in the store so that they could make better decisions moving forward. When you and I take the spiritual inventory, it's to find out what is truly inside of us so that we can take the correct steps moving forward. And sometimes taking this spiritual inventory isn't fun because you're going to discover some ugly things in your life.

We all do. But the benefit is that after you have discovered those ugly things, you can give them up to God and rid yourself of them. James says in his book that a spiritual inventory is like a mirror that you hold up to your face, and when you see it, you can spot the areas that need to be cleaned. Don't be like the person that looks in the mirror and then walks away and forgets what they looked like. Find those things and then take action on those things.

The final thing that you and I need to constantly evaluate is our heart. It's our love deep down. Again, what is our motivation? Revelation, chapter 2, verse 4. Speaking of a particular church, Jesus says, "Yet I hold this against you. You have forsaken the love you had at first ." In this verse, Jesus is confronting a church. He is confronting believers, people that were working hard. They were enduring hardship and persecution.

This church was standing on truth. They were doing all of the right things, but Jesus said they had lost their first love for Him. They were doing all of the right things, but for the wrong reasons. And the crazy thing is this isn't

always observable from the outside. You can't always look at somebody and say, "Yep, that person's on the right track. They're doing the right thing," or, "That person's a mess ." Sometimes from the outside it looks different.

Again, you can go to church, you can read your Bible, you can pray, you can tithe, you can say all the right things, you can have all of the right answers and even have Scripture memorized and still have a sour heart. You guys know that there's people that probably come on Sunday morning, every single Sunday morning, and don't have a true relationship with Jesus in every church, probably across the world. It's something deeper. That's why it's a personal inventory.

And so a great question for us to ask ourselves would be, "Am I doing things for Jesus while gradually losing my love for Jesus? What is my motivation for what I do? Is it love or is it obligation?" Motives matter. All through Scripture you see the truth that God is more concerned with your heart than with your obedience. He's more concerned with what's on the inside than with what you're doing. He wants the inside to be taken care of.

He wants the inside to be clean. In his first letter to the Corinthian church, Paul tells them to examine themselves. When he's talking to them there in 1 Corinthians, he's telling them to examine themselves in preparation for taking communion. Because he says when you come to the table and you take communion, if you are not in a good relationship with God and with others, you are eating and drinking judgment on yourselves. These are pretty strong words that Paul is using.

And you'll notice if you've been a part of Fairview for any time when we take communion, I speak that every single time to make sure that we evaluate our relationship with God and our relationship with others. This is a spiritual inventory, but you and I both know it's impossible to take that inventory in a few seconds before communion, right? It's something that takes time. It takes energy. And so I encourage you, make time this week to do this spiritual inventory.

Ask some of these difficult questions. If you weren't able to write the notes down, you can go on YouVersion in the events, and all of these questions are listed there so that you can maybe do it later today or sometime this week when you have time. And so I ask you the question today, "How are you doing?" Really, how are you doing in your walk with Jesus? If you were to take the spiritual inventory, what is God going to show you? Take some time to self - evaluate.

You know, I was preparing for this message, and God often has a sense of humor in my life that as I'm getting ready to preach something, He's got to do a work in me first. And so yesterday, most Saturdays, my wife and I know that if we don't want to get in a fight, that she needs to ask me, "Joel, what is your plan for today? What do you want to get accomplished?" Because she knows my personality. My personality is I always have a list in my head of all of the things that I need to do. I like to get things done. I definitely think my love language is acts of service.

I just like to do that. I like things to be nice. And so I always have a project in my mind of something that needs to get done. And so yesterday, of course, I've got my list of everything that needs to get done around the house, all of the things that I need to prepare for and everything else. And it's very difficult for me to just take time to just rest. And God just spoke to my heart yesterday. And I got up and I was getting ready to do some of those chores, and God said, "Hey, you haven't spent any time with me yet." I'm like, "Okay, okay. I'm a pastor. I get it, God.

All right ." So I open up my devotions. And one of the devotions that I try to do every day is the Jesus Calling. Some of you are familiar with that book. I've been doing it every day for a couple of years now. And wouldn't you know it, when I open up the Jesus Calling that day. The full of the Lord's name. Amen. Putting aside your list and trusting in God. You can accomplish a lot more if you spend the first part of your day with Him. And I

thought, "Okay, God, I got it. I got the message." You know, but we just have all of these things that we think have to get done.

And yet I'm reminded that Paul says that compared to knowing Jesus, everything else is rubbish. Yesterday, on my list of things to do was to power wash our patio, our concrete patio, and reseal it. Because you know, those of you that have a concrete patio, if you don't do that, it cracks and it gets weird spots and whatever else. And as I was sitting there doing my quiet time with God, looking at the patio while I'm sitting in our living room, thinking, "I got to get that done. I got to get that done," it was as if God reminded me, "You know what, Joel?

That patio is going to look just as bad a year from now, whether you do this or not," right? All of the things in our world, all of the things that I spend time on, that I try to make perfect, my yard, you know, I'm out there picking weeds. And anybody that's ever had a house that you took care of a yard and then you sold it and you drive by again and someone doesn't take care of the yard, if you're like me, doesn't that just crush your spirit? But that's the truth. When you're done taking care of it, guess what? It's just going to overgrow again. It doesn't take long for those things to come back.

And it's like God just had to remind me, "Those things don't matter." Some of the projects that I've spent time on in my woodworking shop, and something doesn't go right or something happens and I end up tearing apart the wood and it becomes firewood anyway. All of the things that we think are important, Paul says are rubbish. They're trash compared to knowing Jesus. And sometimes it just takes that moment to sit down, take a breath, and begin to ask some of these difficult questions of God and to say, "You know what, God?

I want to be honest in this time." Because I've also found it to be true, and I hope this isn't only me, you can lie to yourself. Am I the only one that can do that? I am. Okay. Well, I'll tell you, I can lie to myself. I can tell myself, "You're doing great in this area, Joel. You're doing great." And then when I truly sit down and evaluate with God, it's like, "Ooh, maybe not so great. Maybe I have some work to do ." So my encouragement to you this week, take some time.

Again, turn off the TV, put down the phone, and just spend some time with God asking these questions. As always, I just want to let you know if you're new to the church, the altar's are always open for you to come and do business with God. But as a matter of privacy, if you come to the altar, we will intentionally not come up and pray with you because we want to respect your privacy. You can come during the closing song. You can come after. No one's going to bother you unless you ask us to come and pray for you. While on the sides of the stage, on both sides, there will be people that would love to pray with you.

So if you want somebody to pray with you or to talk with you, please go to the sides. We'd love to do that. The altar is always open to do your business with God. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for today. Thank you for encouraging us to take some time to evaluate where we are at, to have an honest conversation with You, to take this spiritual inventory so that we can grow and take our next step.

Help us to be honest with ourselves. Father, would You point out the areas that we need to grow? Would You also point out those areas where You are pleased? And show us and take us where You want to lead us. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.