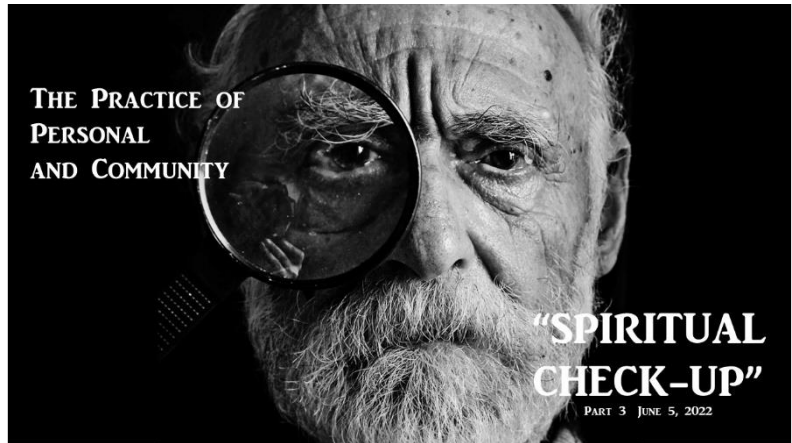


The Practice of Personal and Community  
“Spiritual Check-up” - Part 3

by Pastor Tim Dodson  
at JF Believers Church  
in Menomonie, Wis  
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Today we are covering part three of our short series on conducting personal and corporate community “*spiritual check-ups*.” We began two weeks ago with part one, wherein we dealt with some of the

practical manifests of our failure to conduct such “check-ups” and moving to correct problem areas. Then last week we covered some of the “doors” we leave open in our lives that inadvertently allow Satan access to our minds, our hearts, and our souls. This week, our final session with this material, I want to deal with practices in our lives that keep those doors shut and locked. Things we can do to foster both defensive and offensive actions in the realm of personal spiritual warfare.

The three areas I would like today to look at are: *Open doors in the mind. Open doors in the heart. Open doors in our physical living.*

**First the open doors in the mind:**

Php 4:8-9 “*Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.*”

“*...fix your thoughts on what is true and honorable and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise... and the God of peace will be with you.*” (Philippians 4:8-9, NLT)

Such is not a defensive action...it is not a **response**. It is an offensive act...a forward movement. It is not a magic elixir...a light switch to flip and all the thoughts that haunt me are instantly gone. It’s a change of habit. It is a combination of turning some stuff *off*, and turning others *on*. I may have to turn off the TV, the constant news feeds, the negative acquaintances, (which may be your blood family by the way) the focus on what *isn't*, and turn ON the channels of God’s voice and direction, the more honest and truthful relationships, the simple joys and time uses, etc.

I have known individuals that through satanic activities, drug use, or overt sin activity, have learned to hear the voice of Satan. Once a person has acquired such an ability, I don’t believe he or she will be able to turn off that radio. The answer is instead to turn up louder the voice of God. Usually we interact with Him as a “still small voice.” But Jeremiah 25:30 and Isaiah 42:13...as well as other places, speak of God “shouting.” God does a lot of shouting in the book of Revelation! Instead of simply trying to rid ourselves of the thoughts and the voices, perhaps we should be more proactive to fill our lives with the shout of God. Books, audio, video, prayer, council and relationships, fellowship and bible study. Sometimes this is a matter of using “overwhelming

force.” We spend all of our time trying to get Satan to stop shooting at us, when we should instead exercise the “nuclear option.” Meaning whatever he is coming at us with, we just get a bigger gun...

Our tendency is to feel sorry for ourselves and wait for the magic cure to come in the mail. Often this serves as an excuse for failure and inactivity. But nearly all of God's instruction in this is proactive and a matter of obedience. 1Pe 1:13 says “*Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*” The NLT vividly restates such as “...so think clearly and exercise self-control.” Paul says in 1 Thessalonians “...we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled.”

A small addendum on this matter: I have heard many folks literally say that a particular relationship has negative impact on their lives, their thoughts, their hearts. And yet those individuals still gravitate to that relationship because it's comfortable...it's 'easy.' Indeed “misery loves company.” And so what we get is two people dragging each other down into the pit. Eventually that relationship turns into a spiritual “murder-suicide.” I drag you down until you are out of the game, and because I then have no place to go, I follow you off the bridge...

1Pe 4:1 says “*Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.*” We are told to literally “arm ourselves,” which is graphic offensive language. The “weapon” we need would be the same mind that Christ Himself had, especially concerning difficulty, persecution, trial and even death. For Christ, it was worth it all to “serve at the pleasure of the king” and to be eternally part of God's work on this earth. The thankfulness and purpose He possessed overshadowed any difficulty and pain. Are you overtly aware of your blessings and standing? Do you think and verbalize them often?

It's amazing how many people profess to know God and follow Him, yet in practice their thinking patterns are just like those of anyone else in the world. Satan loves that. He wants you to be so absorbed with the ways of the world that you are clueless about what God wants of you or thinks about you and the life you are leading. He will do this through subtle messages in music lyrics, statements from your favorite celebrity, and words of advice from friends (even friends of yours who are believers, but are quoting “verses” that are not in the Bible or are tortured out of context).

### **Open doors in the heart.**

Jesus spoke to the church of Ephesus in Revelation 2 saying that He had something against them' in that they had “left their first love.” That didn't mean that this church no longer served Christ, or had great compassion for Him. It means they had allowed “other gods” to come before Him. That He was no longer first in all matters of life. They, like many of us, have simply fallen in lust with the world. The “want” of the world became the deciding factor in their lives not Christ. Instead of jobs and living scenario's fitting into God's plan for us, we arrange our life to embrace the world and then seek to make God and church fit into that agenda.

There's a reason God's Word tells us: “*Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it*” (Proverbs 4:23). Satan knows he has an entry point into your life if God is not first in your heart...your “passions.” God's first commandment, set forth in the Old Testament, was: “*You shall have no other gods before me*” (Exodus 20:3). And Jesus restated that, under the New Covenant, when He was asked what is the greatest commandment He responded by saying “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind...*” (Luke 10:27). Satan's has a great desire to distract you...to cause you to desire other things and other people more than Christ. He will try to prevent you from

giving God all of your heart so he will constantly dangle people, things, and desires in front of you – anything to distract you so he can erect a false god in front of you that you don't even realize you have. Often these false gods are seemingly benign or even perhaps a perceived blessing to our life because they bring us happiness, pleasure, and ease.

Satan will try to lure you subtly away from a God priority life with a false god like your career, a spouse or love interest, a dream or goal, a hobby or lifestyle. Some of us love food, money, recreation, our children, a substance, or a “feeling” (like being in love, or feeling energetic) more than God Himself. This fight too, is a matter of offensive, pre-emptive action and not waiting to react, defend, or fix it once it's broke. We guard the doors to our heart by continually and consciously evaluating, testing, and re-examining our lives on the matter. Perhaps we should make a list of what's most important in our lives and then evaluate ...quantifying each one: *is Christ more important than these? Do I love Him more? What is my measurement metrics? How am I measuring that data?*

Scripture commands us: *“Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is”* (Romans 12:2, NLT). This issue leads naturally and is compulsory to the issue of sanctification, which is a real and practical surrender of our lives to come under His will and plan for us.

**1 Thess 4:3** *“For this is the will of God, your sanctification...”*

Jesus had a lot to say about sanctification in John 17. In verse 16 the Lord says, *“They are not of the world, even as I am not of it,”* and this is before His request: *“Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth”* (verse 17). In Christian theology, sanctification is a state of separation unto God. Theologians sometimes refer to this state of holiness before God as “positional” sanctification or what we know as “justification,” which is a “spiritual standing” work and verdict executed by God alone.

While born again we are **positionally** holy, we should know that we still fall short of full commitment...short of a life reflecting Christ in all that we are and all that we do. That's why the Bible also refers to sanctification as a **practical** experience of our separation unto God. “Progressive” or “experiential” sanctification, as it is sometimes called, is the effect of obedience to the Word of God in one's life. It is the same as growing in the Lord (2 Peter 3:18) or spiritual maturity. God started the work of making us like Christ and opening our eyes to truth and reality, and He is continuing it (Philippians 1:6). This type of sanctification must be personally **pursued** by the believer earnestly (1 Peter 1:15; Hebrews 12:14) and is effected by the life application of the Word (John 17:17).

This form of sanctification has in view the setting apart of a believer for the purpose for which he or she is sent into the world: *“As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified”* (John 17:18–19). Jesus set **Himself apart** for God's purpose and is both the basis and the model of our being set apart (see John 10:36). We too are called to sanctification and are subsequently “sent out” because Jesus was. All of which is a critical aspect of being like Christ! Our Lord's sanctification is the *pattern of* and *power for* our own. Prior to salvation, our behavior bore witness to our standing in the world in separation from God, but now our behavior must bear witness to our standing before God in separation from the world, which is more important now than at any time in history. Sanctification is an event **and** a journey! A surrender “experience” as well as an ongoing walk away from the world. Further and further, every day, “those who are being sanctified” leave this world behind (Hebrews 10:14, ESV) and become more like Christ.

## Open doors in our physical living.

Years ago I was a maintenance supervisor for a fairly large real estate company. One of the professional practices in that field of work is operating a “preventative maintenance schedule.” The definition of such is as follows: Preventive maintenance (PM) is **the regular and routine maintenance of equipment and assets in order to keep them running and prevent any costly unplanned downtime from unexpected equipment failure**. A successful maintenance strategy requires planning and scheduling maintenance and service of equipment before a problem occurs.

Without such a program, down times are longer and repairs are more expensive. And that goes for machinery as well as our own personal lives. How many testimonies have you heard or read that say if they had just dealt with the issues when they were small...*if they had just invested to a greater degree early in the issue*, they might still be married, still be healthy, still be financially stable, have a better family life or kids that are believers, etc?

Paul the apostle...in Romans 12, made a call upon us that is crucial to our understanding of this spiritual war that we all face. He appealed to the believer to “offer up their bodies” as a sacrifice unto God. Why is it that when people get depressed they overeat or drink excessively or turn to substances? Why is it that young girls will cut their bodies or starve themselves when they are dealing with emotional pain? I believe it’s because Satan will turn us against our bodies if he can, as a way of “getting back at God” and to prevent us physically from serving Him. Our bodies are precious to God. Ironically, despite the overt inclusion of this principle throughout scripture, it seems we have overwhelmingly ditched it for a more cerebral model. We want to *feel* Christian, *think* Christian, *relate* Christian, and *benefit* Christian...but are far more averse to *living out* Christian. Tit 1:16 speaks of such saying “*They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.*” **Living our Christianity** is a faith on a whole other level...one that requires some sweat, some sacrifice, some daring, effort, and fortitude. It will mean telling yourself ‘no’ on some things. The intellectual version is always yes...always affirming, and always easy. The “living out” version is harder. *Few* will find that way because it is narrow.

However, to shut the doors that we spoke of last week, and moreover to *keep them shut*, we must engage in the physical...the practical...the engaging version of faith. Verse 11 ...NLT...of that chapter in Romans says “*Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically.*” We know scripture tells us to be obedient, but obedience is not just a mental condition but a physical action. We already spoke to the reality that if one is Holy Spirit filled, then he or she is already equipped for this. In other words, ***we have the stuff***. But we still must decide whether we will let that power actually manifest itself...whether we will actually step up to the plate. One thing is for sure. If all of this was easy, pleasant and appealing to the flesh, it would be done already. For sure you are going to have to spiritually, mentally and physically “break a sweat.” After all, we are told to *run* the race, *walk* in the Spirit, *fight* the good fight, *strive* to enter in, *be* of one accord and mind, *labor* of love, *do* the work, *put on* tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, etc. The scriptural list goes on and on. Such a Christian dynamic will not come to your house via Amazon. You have to truly get up...get out there, and *engage*. All of this is to firmly keep Christ on the throne of your life so Satan doesn’t try to sneak anything else in there.

So what’s your strategy now that you know the areas where Satan wants to enter your life? God gives us a great defense through Paul’s instructions to the saints in Ephesians 6:11-18: “*Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes...*” I find it interesting that every piece of “armor” described in that passage refers to the character of Christ. In other words, put on Christ-likeness. Passionately

learn about Him, strive to become like Him, respond to the world around you as He did. Spiritually “work out” and get strong. **Php 2:12** *“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation** with fear and trembling...”* Abide in Christ, be clothed in His character and righteousness, and you *will* fend off the attacks of the enemy.