

## Thinking about Spiritual Health Lt. Col. Ann Braund

We are spiritual beings, who live in a spiritual realm and every day our spiritual life is being formed. This phrase “heavenly realms” is used several times in the book of Ephesians (1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12). It is translated from the Greek word *epouranios*, meaning “the sphere of spiritual activities.” “Heavenly realms” can refer to both angelic and demonic activity. We live our daily lives in a spiritual realm which constantly influences and affects us for good or for evil.

Dallas Willard spoke of a process of spiritual formation which is taking place in all people. He wrote, “The most despicable as well as the most admired of persons are being formed spiritually. This spiritual formation may be in either a positive or a negative direction. The positive direction involves the cultivation of virtues that promote love, peace, justice and well-being. The negative direction stirs self-protection and disrupts societal welfare and well-being. All persons of good will, Christian and non-Christian, should celebrate the presence of virtues that promote societal wellness, shalom and justice. For God is behind movements toward love, peace and justice.”<sup>1</sup>

C. S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* spoke of this ongoing spiritual formation: “Taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning that central [part of you] into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature: either into a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellow-creatures, and with itself... Each of us at each moment is progressing to the one state or the other.”

Robert Mulholland, author of *Invitation to a Journey*, agrees: “We are being shaped into either the wholeness of the image of Christ or a horribly destructive caricature of that image—destructive not only to ourselves but also to others, for we inflict our brokenness upon them... We become either the agents of God’s healing and liberating grace or carriers of the sickness of the world... Spiritual formation is not an option!”

Spiritual Health is measured by our responses to spiritual influences. God is behind positive spiritual influence. “God has chosen to bless us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3).

### 1. Our Spiritual Health can be measured by our responses

Our Spiritual Health can be measured by our responses to the invisible powers at play in the spiritual realm. In the spiritual realm, God is actively working for love, peace and justice. Mysteriously there is another force at work. The forces of evil seek to distort love, disrupt peace and defeat justice (Ephesians 2:1-8). Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, a victory in the Spiritual Realm was won. God raised Jesus and gave Him an exalted position, a place of power, in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:6). In the name and power of Jesus Christ people are able to say “yes” to the blessings of God.

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<sup>1</sup> James Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community*, p. 35

Moses, an Old Testament prophet, urged the people of God to choose life. “This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to His voice and hold fast to Him. For the LORD is your life” (Deuteronomy 30:19-20). Health and wellness is about saying ‘yes’ to the LORD who is life.

## 2. Spiritual Health is measured by an experience of fullness

Saying ‘yes’ to God leads us to an experience of fullness which can also be a way of measuring Spiritual Health. Ephesians 3:19 speaks of an experience of being “filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” Ephesians 4:13 speaks of “attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” Ephesians 5:18 speaks of being continuously filled by the Spirit of God. What does the fullness of God look like? Paul, who wrote the letter to the Ephesians, experienced the fullness of God while being cold, hungry and in prison. Therefore we can conclude that the fullness of God is not about prosperity, a full belly, a full bank account or a full closet. The fullness of God is about love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, goodness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Fullness is about experiencing God. It is about being alive to and filled with who God is. “God is love” (1 John 4:8-9). What part do we play in our experience of God’s fullness? We must choose to receive, to open ourselves to the gracious activities of God in the spiritual realm, the realm in which we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28).

## 3. Spiritual Health is measured by growth and unity

The Apostle Paul speaks of a ‘growing up’ process; a movement from infancy toward maturity (Ephesians 4:14-15). He also speaks of moving toward a time when all things in heaven and earth will come together under one head, Christ Jesus (1:10). Spiritual Health is measured by a growing unity; a movement toward God and our neighbor.

Mindy Caliguire says, “Spiritual Health is measured by our connection and receptivity to God.” Life teaches us that connection and receptivity to God does not just happen. We do not naturally drift toward God. In fact Scripture tells us that we all naturally stray and fall away (Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:23). Therefore we need to pay attention to what it is we are saying ‘yes.’ Spiritual Health is a ‘Yes’ to the blessings of God.