

When Enough Isn't Enough: How Over-Spiritualizing Can Hurt You

God is always enough. He has all the answers. There is no higher calling in life than to know Him, love Him and follow Him. But in serving Him there are plenty of times when prayer and Bible study are not enough.

We as human beings too easily put things in boxes. We either over-spiritualize every aspect of our lives or separate (perhaps unconsciously) the earthly and heavenly parts of our existence. Some people believe they're serving God more than adequately if they spend an hour or two in church each week and a few minutes a day in personal or family devotions. And other people may devote hours each day to prayer and Bible study while their marriage, children, bank account, friendships, mental and physical health, work and home go unattended.

God made you and me as integrated, whole human beings. You cannot separate your physical, emotional, relational and spiritual parts from one another anymore than you can separate the flour, sugar, eggs and salt from a loaf of bread. What impacts one area of your life impacts all the other areas. Every dimension of our lives needs adequate tending and nourishment for us to be our best and serve God with our whole being.

Failure to understand this has often led to serious problems for believers:

- The person with diabetes or severe depression who refuses professional help while praying for healing
- The seminary student preparing to be a pastor and seriously addicted to pornography

- The wife spending hours alone reading the Bible while her husband starves for intimacy
- The Christian leader whose ministry is cut short through the health effects of obesity
- Believers frustrated when urgent matters (such as helping those affected by Hurricane Harvey) “interfere” with their spiritual pursuits.

While the greatest miracle of all is the salvation and restoration of a human soul, most of Jesus’ earthly miracles were focused on very earthly things—food, storms, physical illness. God is equally concerned about and invested in every dimension of our lives.

Here are three dimensions where we must be careful to not over-spiritualize.

1. Our Personal Nourishment

Spending all day every day in prayer and Bible study would leave you unbalanced and relatively useless to God or anyone else. That may sound strong, but it’s true. Prayer and Bible study are vital soul nourishment, but God didn’t create human beings to *only* do that.

Think of it this way. You eat food and drink water every day. You hopefully place greatest value on the spiritual nourishment you get from God’s Word, but that doesn’t stop you from sitting down to a meal. Periods of fasting can be vital spiritually, but refraining from food indefinitely will end your life far too soon. It’s the same with the other nourishment we need. Although there’s no limit to the value of prayer and Bible study, we also must take into our being the necessary nourishment for our body and mind.

That nourishment may include such things as inspiring biographies, educational media, fun with friends, time resting, non-spiritual books or wholesome entertainment. Jesus demonstrated this well. He did not spend all His time in

“spirituality.” He walked, talked, ate, wept, laughed and slept. He told stories about real-life situations the people around Him understood. He was a very human being, as much a man as He was God—something we too often forget.

2. Our Individual Development

Your learning must include God’s Word first and most. But it also must include stretching your mind and skills in other dimensions if you want to be as useful as possible for God’s kingdom. That is likely to include learning how to care for your body, new ways of thinking and behaving to replace old negative baggage, skills in leadership, finance, the arts, or business, healthy parenting and the emotional intelligence necessary for marriage and interacting with all other people.

While God’s Word informs all those dimensions, God never intended the Bible to be our only source of learning exclusive of every other avenue. While we must have a biblical foundation to filter other information through, God has provided many other sources as well.

We learn through observing God’s creation in nature, scientific investigation and discovery, watching how people behave, respond and learn, and many other ways. While God’s word must form the foundation, actively seeking out other sources of learning will both enrich your life and dramatically increase your value and usefulness for God’s kingdom.

3. Our Spiritual Service

We can easily inappropriately elevate “church work” to a higher standard than pursuits more directly related to this earth. Yet remember how Jesus and His followers clearly demonstrated that all we do is service to God. “If a brother or sister is naked and lacking daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” and yet you give them nothing that the body needs, what does it profit?”

(James 2:15-16).

You are serving God just as much when you are changing diapers, writing a report for your boss, grocery shopping, mowing the lawn or having a time of intimacy with your spouse as when you are praying or reading the Bible. I was serving God just as much when I adjusted my husband's oxygen or took him to his doctor's appointments as when I am now writing and speaking.

"Therefore, whether you eat, or drink, or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). Seeing every aspect of your life as spiritual service can sanctify everything you do.

When you care for your mind and body, you're doing it in order to have your best self available for all God wants you to do. When you are studying, learning or getting refreshed, you're investing in the tools God needs you to have for any other service. When you are doing practical things to care for your spouse, child or friend you are doing it as unto Jesus. When you make money, create something beautiful or enlightening, choose a useful job or career or "whatever you do," choose to see it as for the glory of God.

While prayer and Bible study are important, don't judge your own or someone else's spirituality primarily by that. Are you tending to the body and mind God entrusted to you? Are you serving the people closest to you best? Are you seeing everything you do as service to God?

Your Turn: Have you been over-spiritualizing some aspect of your life? Is there some of the "whatever you do" that you need to more clearly offer as spiritual service? Leave a comment below. {eo}

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