

INTRODUCTION

We're in our series on the "Organic Church." First we looked at the word "organic." In essence, it means living, natural, no synthetic or fake stuff in it.

Then we looked at the word "church." It is: living God; living connection; and living people. ***It is divinely fired, yet it is intensely human.***

Today, we start putting the two words together. And the first authority we refer to is... NASA! With the satellite snapshots and the rovers on the surface of Mars, an old question was resurrected: ***Is there life on the planet?*** But asking that question caused them to step back and ask other questions like: ***How exactly do you define "life?" What are the signs of genuine life?*** And if you're going to look for life, you need to know this: ***What are the bare minimums or the "non-negotiables" for life?***

By the way, for physical life, scientists would say: ***Air, water, fire (or energy), and food.***

Well, we're going to borrow from NASA's thoughts but look at it in a spiritual context. So let's start with the basic question: ***How exactly do we define "spiritual life?"***

Does it exist in a person who is interested in "spiritual" things, whatever that means? -No

Perhaps it's when you have a genuine spiritual experience of some kind!

-Again, no. God has even made donkeys speak His message. That doesn't mean one is spiritually alive. It just means God can do anything!

Maybe the answer is a little more Biblical; is it when a person claims to accept Christ?

-Sadly, again the answer is no. That is an essential step, but motives and understanding can fall so far from the mark that spiritual life doesn't take root. That was the whole point of the parable of the seeds.

Then what is "spiritual life?" ***How do you or I know for a certainty that we are spiritually alive?*** -Let's start with this clue.

Jesus said:

John 14

20. "At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you."

A person is spiritually alive when the presence of God lives and works within them, causing that person to begin reasoning, feeling, reacting, and living in the nature of Christ Himself. Or to put it simply: It's when you start looking like your heavenly Father. So then, let's move on to the next "NASA question"...

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR THE CHURCH TO BE "DIVINELY FIRED?"

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR THE CHURCH TO BE "INTENSELY HUMAN?"

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU ARE "SPIRITUALLY ALIVE?"

1. IS THERE LIFE ON THIS PLANET?

Is there even spiritual life in our little corner?

Like NASA, let's orbit the satellite and look at a few snapshots:

Snapshot #1: Archie Comics

Perhaps you read Archie comics as a kid. The writers are introducing a new character this month; Kevin Keller. And the character is openly homosexual. Keep in mind: This is reading material for an audience just beginning to form their sexual morals and identity.

The target is your children. Well, let's be open-minded here; **what's so bad about presenting a positive view of homosexuality?** According to Scripture, the issue isn't that homosexuals are bad or good people. It's not even about acceptability. It is about life or death. If we look at the Old or New Testament, homosexual people are not singled out. It is the culture. In both Testaments, the cultural acceptance of homosexuality as a norm is the **final stage of spiritual decay of that society.** It illustrates a point of no return; the end of spiritual life. In a country where it is now against the law to speak against homosexuality; how close are we?

Snapshot #2: A Different Walk

I was at our district conference this week, and during sharing, there was an interesting testimony from our sister churches in Bartlett, Illinois. Some of you may remember Pastor Tim Poferl. He taught a seminar for our teachers.

Tim said, there were five churches in his immediate area without a pastor. His own church was suffering serious spiritual oppression. One day he noticed people out prayer walking, but they weren't Christian, they were Muslim. And they were stopping in his parking lot and praying against his church. Things didn't get better until he and his own people got a whole lot more serious in their own prayer.

The answer, yes there is spiritual life on this planet, but it is dim and flickering. ...Then how about this...

WHAT DO YOU THINK?
IS THERE SPIRITUAL LIFE ON THIS PLANET?

2. IS THERE LIFE IN THE CHURCH?

The church is supposed to be the bastion of spiritual life. How is the church doing?

Snapshot #1

From recent Barna research:

- Only one-third (34%) **believe in absolute moral truth.**
- 68% of self-identified Christians have heard of spiritual gifts, [but only] **one-third can actually identify a biblical spiritual gift they claim to possess.**
- Just half of all self-identified Christians firmly **believe that the Bible is totally accurate in all of the principles.** [Not the facts, just the principles!]

- Barely one-quarter of adults (27%) are **confident that Satan exists**.

Barna concludes:

...we become our own unchallenged spiritual authorities, defining truth and reality as we see fit.

Question: **What happens when people become the final authority instead of God?**

Snapshot #2

From a completely different source. This is from John Soper, vice-president for Church Ministries in the C&MA:

National pollsters have repeatedly documented the fact that regular church attendance has little or no impact when it comes to shaping the behavior patterns of the people of God. Christians are just as likely to sue their neighbors, cheat on their income taxes, engage in inappropriate sexual behavior and divorce their spouses as the general population. In fact, one recent survey actually showed a slightly higher rate of divorce among evangelical Christians!

Once again, by any definition God gives; this is *not* spiritual life. **Something essential must be missing.** And that brings us to the next “NASA question”: What are the bare minimums or...

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

WHAT ARE SOME NEGATIVE SIGNS OF THE CHURCH’S SPIRITUAL HEALTH?

WHAT ARE SOME POSITIVE SIGNS OF THE CHURCH’S SPIRITUAL HEALTH?

3. WHAT ARE THE NON-NEGOTIABLES FOR A SPIRITUAL LIFE?

Well, for a living church, it is: a living God (*check*); a living connection (*Holy Spirit, check*); and people who are spiritually alive. (*Hmm*)

So then, what are the non-negotiables for us; what are the bare minimums for you and I to be spiritually alive? Again, let’s borrow from the scientists and put it in a spiritual context: First of all, there must be...

✚ AIR (INTIMACY WITH GOD)

That sounds a bit broad, so let me offer an illustration: Imagine your favorite TV show. Now imagine your eyes are closed and you can only hear it. *Do you think you could identify the characters just by their voices?* Congratulations! You have an intimate knowledge of that program. Question: **When you close your eyes in prayer before God; can you identify His voice?**

This is the air I breathe. This is the air I breathe. Your holy presence, living in me.”

Air; breathing: There are some interesting things about breathing. One thing is, the fact, it is so **natural to you**; you don't even think about it, you just do it. It's not a duty, you don't need a guilt trip; you do it as a function of living.

When you breathe, **you assimilate**. Those oxygen molecules are absorbed by the lungs, then pass into the bloodstream and do work through every living part of you. **You are saturated with air**.

Do you "breathe" God? I don't ask if you read a bit of God's Word. I don't ask if you say your little prayers. I ask; **is every living part of you saturated with Him?** That is the function of spiritual life.

Read God's Word, but it does nothing until it is "assimilated", understood and lived by. Pray, but make it as thorough and as natural as breathing. Do it inside these walls. Do it outside these walls. Stay connected 24/7. **When it affects even the most ordinary things you do**; you are becoming intimate. You are beginning to come to life.

✚ WATER (OBEDIENCE)

One type of baptism God mandates is water baptism. Do you know what that is? It is **obedience in liquid form**.

Consider this:

1 Sam 15

22. ... to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.

This is Old Testament! Giving sacrifices was to obey, wasn't it? -*Not necessarily*. It could be a simple case of **going through the motions**.

Matt 15

8. `These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me.

9. And in vain they worship Me..."

Obedience doesn't start with the mouth. It doesn't even start with the attitude of the heart. It starts with the nature of the heart. It starts with what you are... *inside*.

Obedience puts you exactly where God is working at that moment. And if you are where He is working, He will be working in you. Obedience changes you. **There is no life without obedience.** (Say that.) –So are you?

✚ FOOD (BREAD)

When Scripture speaks of sustenance, it usually uses the word, "bread." And bread is used in a couple of ways.

Matt 4

4. But He answered and said, "It is written, `Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.' "

"By every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

Question: ***How do words proceed from the mouth of God?*** Well, there is His written Word. But the original Greek, “logos” means more than written word. It is ***the core reasoning for one’s view***. To put it another way; ***it is, possessing a practical experience of the words***.

For example, I might say, “*Next winter, whatever you do, don’t touch your tongue on your aluminum shovel.*” You understand but you try it anyway. ...If you have never had the first-hand experience of yanking your tongue, melded to frozen metal, and leaving the top layer of skin behind... you will then have the logos of those words. Now you see!

Psalms 34

8. Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!

If you have experienced trusting God; if you know first-hand; it is far more than an intellectual understanding. **It has become a living thing.**

Bread is used in another way; **John 6**

35. And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.

Jesus is bread. Who is Jesus? Jesus is God in physical form. Jesus is God’s practical plan for spiritual rescue. Jesus is the physical example of how to live God’s nature in this physical world. Jesus is friendship with God. Jesus is belonging to God’s family. Jesus said He is proof of what spiritual life brings. Jesus is our new identity. Jesus covers our failure as human beings. Jesus is our line of reference. Jesus is our heritage.

And ***if Jesus is our bread***; we don’t have to hunger because we have consumed righteousness. The goodness we are wired to desire now lives within us. -If Jesus is our bread.

✚ FIRE (PASSION or LOVE)

Every living thing craves warmth. In mammals, one way to know something is alive, is by its warmth. Did you know, the chemical that makes your heart muscles fire, ATP is the same chemical that makes fire flies glow? –*Fire within; fire of the heart.*

1 Cor 13

2. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but **have not love**, I am **nothing**.

A person can have some very impressive signs of life. But if there is no love; they are zero on the life scale. So, love who?

Matt 22

36. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"

37. Jesus said to him, " `You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'

...

That is the first part of it. We can teach people Scripture; *and that's essential*. We can attract them every week; *consistency is important*. We can teach *really important things*. But until people **fall in love** with the saving person of Jesus Christ, there is no life.

38. "This is the first and great commandment.

39. "And the second is like it: 'You shall **love your neighbor** as yourself.'

Love is love when we take the capacities that God is building in us and use them for the sake of others. We do it with a passion. Where there is no fire, there is no life.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY ARE THE BARE MINIMUMS FOR SPIRITUAL LIFE TO EXIST IN A PERSON? /IN A CHURCH?

CAN YOU EXPAND ON THE COMPONENTS OFFERED IN THIS STUDY?

CONCLUSION: SIGNS OF LIFE

Just quickly, what are signs we are becoming spiritually alive? The first is; we're *becoming!* **Becoming humble.** Humility is knowing exactly what you are. That's why salvation starts with brokenness- realizing you are too wretchedly lost to save yourself and your only hope is Christ. Knowing exactly who you are; God is building spiritual gifts in you; capacities and potential that are so precious, you can't even appreciate them until you begin to come to life. **A new gentleness.** Even the hardest people begin to soften in such a way it opens doors to people they could never reach before.

New values. You spend time with God and His people because you miss it if you don't! You value the destiny of others, and you lose value for anything that hinders your connection to God, His purpose in you, and other people who are the object of that purpose.

You blossom in the fruits of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and self-control.

You become aware of your gifts from the Spirit. And you engage!

Nothing else matters until you can answer yes to this question: **ARE YOU SPIRITUALLY ALIVE?**

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

JUDGING FROM THE SIGNS MENTIONED, HOW WOULD YOU COMMENT ON YOUR OWN SPIRITUAL LIFE (HEALTHY, UNHEALTHY, GROWING, STALE, ETC.)?

WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT?