

Becoming Spiritually Alive

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Fully Alive
2 Peter 1:3-9

We're starting a campaign here today called Fully Alive. The design of the campaign is to focus upon the discipleship of our whole church, from toddlers to empty nesters. The theme verse of this campaign is found Habakkuk 2:

Habakkuk 2:4b The Message

But the person in right standing before God
through loyal and steady believing
is fully alive, *really* alive.

Back in the second century, a Christian Bishop from France named Irenaeus said,
"The glory of God is a person fully alive!"

Over the next six weeks, I plan to teach a series to encourage all of you to live lives that are fully alive whatever the news out there. Whatever your sense of the trend lines are regarding your community or this state or this country or even this world, the promise of scripture is that we could be Fully Alive! I'm going to teach on six different aspects of being Fully Alive. This week I'll talk about becoming spiritually alive.

Next week, you won't want to miss that talk, I'll be interviewing a prominent medical researcher that taught at the med school at Ohio State for many years. We'll be talking about the link up of our physical health with our relationships, our spiritual lives, our work and so on. I think my interview with Dr. Bill Malarkey will be a fascinating one for you to hear.

The following week, I'll talk about becoming relationally alive and then emotionally alive, financially alive and then finally on Palm Sunday, we'll talk about our world, both locally and internationally, in a Palm Sunday talk called "A World Fully Alive".

I think these talks would be great ones to invite friends to. My prayer is that at the end of these six weeks, every one of us will be able to look back and say, "You know what? I really feel like I'm changing. I feel like the goal that I set during this campaign is being achieved. I'm living out more of God's purpose in a particular area of life. I feel more alive."

Today, I'm going to kick off this series with a talk that I've titled, "Becoming Spiritually Alive".

Let's pray.

2 Peter 1:3-9

³ His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. ⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. ⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

It's important to remember that the Apostle Peter is writing to Christians. Christians who are discouraged. Christians who are weighed down. Christians who feel like their lives are not what they ought to be. I've chosen to become a follower of Jesus Christ, and yet I thought I'd be a lot happier than this. I thought I'd be doing a lot better than I'm doing. Or to use the words of Habakkuk 2 and the early church father, Irenaeus, I thought I would become Fully Alive if I accepted Christ.

So, what's the answer? Some people confess their sins to Christ. They come to the cross and they ask Christ to forgive them. They open their hearts to receive the Lord. They follow him baptism. But they still feel, in the words of Peter, ineffective and unproductive. They feel nearsighted and blind. Some of those folks say, "Christianity is not working for me. I tried it for a while, but I didn't produce the effects that I thought it would so I stopped going to church." Others say, "Maybe I need to get baptized again." Probably the most common response to this discouraging condition is to just give up. "Oh, I'll go to church when I can. I may even occasionally try a small group, but I lower my expectations of the Christian life. I don't really believe that someone like me could be fully alive. I'm always going to feel half dead inside."

Peter is writing to discouraged, depressed Christians and he's offering them a way out of their discouragement and depression. What is the way? Here's the first step to becoming spiritually alive.

We need to own up to our condition

2 Peter 1:8

⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When I see that word, ineffective, I think of a Christian who has a picture in their mind about what the Christian life ought to be like, but they don't know how to get there. They say that a follower of Christ ought to be joyful. A follower of Christ shouldn't be constantly comparing themselves with others. A follower of Christ ought to be overcoming sin and resisting temptation. A follower of Christ ought to find it easier and easier to be really generous. We ought to be sexually pure. We ought to break down dividing walls between people. We should be the least racist of anyone in our society. We should be the most inclusive toward immigrants and refugees. The follower of Christ should easily forgive.

The ineffective Christian says, "I have in my mind what a follower of Christ ought to be like, but I'm not that kind of person and I have no clear path of getting there."

We need to own up to our condition. We need to say, "Lord, I am ineffective in knowing how to become spiritually alive or physically alive or relationally alive or emotionally alive or financially alive. My methods are ineffective, God, they're not producing what I want them to. And I need to own up to being unproductive."

2 Peter 1:8

⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The word "unproductive" could also be translated "unfruitful." You may see a barrenness in terms of your evangelism. You know Jesus Christ. You may have a desire to see other people know Christ, but it may be years or never in the course of your life that you actually impact one person toward receiving Christ as their Savior. Not one. No children. No teens. No adults. No parents. No one.

You read in the Bible that the Christian life is to be a fruit bearing life, a life of multiplication, a life where God gets some return on the talents that he has given us, but your life is a barren life. Maybe it is barren in terms of your bearing the fruit of the Holy Spirit. You look at your life and you say, "I don't see very much fruit. I am not very loving or joyful or patient or kind. Maybe I see myself as someone who is easily irritated, often really upset like a person walking around with a very bad sunburn." Everything irritates you. Everything bugs you. You are always in a funk. People have to walk on egg shells around you.

Lord, I'm ineffective. Lord, I'm unproductive. These are hard things to acknowledge, but our condition may even be worse than that Peter says in verse 9:

2 Peter 1:9

⁹ But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

Apparently, it is absolutely possible to be a Christian and yet be in the condition that Peter describes in verse 9.

What does it mean to be nearsighted? It means that you can only see things close up. In other words, the Christian who is not Fully Alive is always going to be a Christian who thinks only of the near term. He is the short-sighted Christian. She is the Christian who only thinks about this moment and how she feels in this moment. She never thinks about the long-term consequences of her particular behavior.

The nearsighted Christian is the Christian who charges up their credit card like crazy at Christmas and then has to live with the hangover of past-due bills over the next six months. The nearsighted Christian is the Christian who constantly gives into their kids' whining and manipulation because they have no long-term perspective of what kind of teenager or adult they want their child to turn into. The nearsighted Christian is the person who constantly gives into their sexual urges, or their appetite for food or drink or TV because that will give immediate gratification. They never say no to themselves for the sake of a long-term goal.

In fact, the nearsighted person is a person who has no goals. No plan to become more fully alive in some area. They live life with no real intentionality. I don't really have an intentional plan about growing in my relationship with God spiritually. I don't have any kind of plan regarding my body – how I'm going to be in shape and stay in shape. Relationally, I don't have any goals, any intentionality regarding maintaining my friendships, connecting with key people, improving my family life. Emotionally, I have no goals for getting rid of some negative emotional baggage that I've been carrying forever. Getting healed up financially – my family doesn't have a plan for getting out of debt or becoming more generous in our giving or tithing.

The first step to becoming spiritually alive is owning up. Lord, I feel ineffective. Lord, I feel unproductive. Lord, I've only been thinking of the short term, I'm nearsighted. So, what's the answer?

Well, Peter not only defines the problem for us, but praise God, the Bible is not like most self-help books that are great at defining the problem. Most self-help books spend twelve chapters laying the problem out. You say, "Yes, yes...that's me; that's what I'm like. Yes, that is my problem!" And then the book spends one chapter offering a solution. An old Puritan once said that you could always tell false teaching because it spends way more time defining the problem than offering the solution. But the Bible is not like that. And the book of 2 Peter is not like that. So Peter offers the solution.

If the first step to becoming Fully Alive is to own up to our condition, the second step is

We need to connect up with God's provision

2 Peter 1:3-4

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

There are certainly different ways that people have attempted to live the Christian life. Some people attempt to grow by will power, by their own determination and grit, looking inside themselves for their own resources, their own positive thinking. Jesus tells us what the result of will power and self-effort will be in John 15:5:

John 15:5

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

You know that that's the first thing I often say to God in the morning in my devotions. When I start my devotions, I often start with this simple statement: Jesus, you said to me that apart from you, I can do nothing. And then I say: Jesus, today, I won't think what I ought to think; I won't feel what I ought to feel; I won't be able to love in the way I ought to love; I won't forgive as you forgive...I run through a list of things that I know that Jesus wants me to be like and I say: Jesus, apart from you and the filling of your Spirit, I won't be able to do any of these things. So as I begin my devotions on some mornings, I open my hands as I sit in my chair with my Bible, and I say: Jesus, come fill me with the Holy Spirit; enable me to do and to be what you want me to do and to be today.

Our solo efforts are doomed to failure. We need Christ's power.

In providing for us to become spiritually alive – effective, fruit-bearing, productive, intentional Christians – Christ not only gives us his power, but also his promises. Verse 4:

2 Peter 1:4

Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

What might be included in these promises? Certainly, his promise of the gift of the Spirit. Peter refers to participating in the divine nature, that Christians are united with

God by the Spirit. We don't become God. We're always creatures. But we can be united to God by faith. Christ's very great and precious promises might include his promise to answer prayer. Jesus said:

Matthew 7:7-11

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; those who seek find; and to those who knock, the door will be opened. "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

Christ's promises might include his promise to be with us which is especially important when we don't feel that our prayers have been answered, or we don't see how they've been answered.

Christ's promises are nothing like the world's promises. Christ's promises are never broken, ever. Christ promised that if we turned our burdens over to him, he would give us rest. Christ promised that he was going away to prepare a place for us and he would come again and he will bring us to where he is. Christ promised that we would never have any temptation too great for us to bear. Christ promised that he would complete his work in us. Christ promised that the church would endure no matter how much pressure comes against the church. Indeed, Christ promises that the church would be on the offense - that the gates of hell would not be able to stand against his church.

Christ keeps his promises.

I think of Christ's promise to guide us. His promise to forgive us whatever we have done or failed to do, if we truly confess. We don't have to live dragging around the regrets of last week, last month or last year. You can't become an effective, fruitful Christian if you don't know what's been given to you – Christ's power, Christ's promises.

We need to own up to our condition. We need to connect up with God's provision. And here's the third step to becoming spiritually alive:

We need to dial up God's blessings

2 Peter 1:9

⁹ But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

There is almost nothing more necessary in becoming spiritually alive than cultivating a good memory. Over and over again, the Bible portrays two types of people: people

who forget easily and live spiritually ineffective, unproductive, nearsighted lives and people who remember and who are, therefore, spiritually alive.

One of the great problems of the Israelites in the Old Testament is that they had terrible memories. Immediately after God freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, they complained about the lack of food and water in the wilderness. They forgot God's miracle of parting the Red Sea, drowning their oppressors. If God could do that, he could certainly provide for them. But they forgot God's power and they quickly forgot how terrible it was to be slaves in Egypt.

We read this in Exodus 16:

Exodus 16:2-3

² In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. ³ The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death."

Aren't we just like the Israelites? After we're forgiven, after God delivers us from some self-inflicted wound. We forget what it was like to be in that condition and we want to return back to our former slavery. We romanticize it. We think things were so much better when I was with that person or doing that thing or in that place. We forget why it was that we turned to Jesus in the first place.

Throughout the Old Testament, the Israelites continually forgot God's warnings. They forgot God's Word. They forgot God's discipline. The call to remember is a constant exhortation in the Bible. If you want to become spiritually alive, you've got to cultivate a good memory. What do we need to remember?

We need to remember Jesus Christ. Paul writes:

2 Timothy 2:8

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel,

We've got to constantly focus and re-focus my heart on Jesus Christ throughout the day – who he is, what he's done, what he wants to do – how good and how powerful Christ is. What do we need to remember? We need to remember not only who Christ is, but who we are.

1 John 3:1

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

We need to remember to pray.

1 Thessalonians 5:17

Pray continually

John Wesley, the great evangelist and the founder of the Methodist church, said only with a bit of exaggeration,

“God does nothing but in response to believing prayer.”

The Lord continually convicts me that the reason why I see so little in my life is because I pray too little. We need to remember Jesus Christ. We need to remember who we are. We need to remember to pray. We need to remember God’s blessings everyday so we can cultivate a heart of thanksgiving.

Psalm 103:2

Praise the LORD, my soul,
and forget not all his benefits

It is good at the end of the day to review your day and to see where God was at work. He hasn’t been absent from your life. What if you constructed your own list, friend, and said, “I’m going to cultivate a better memory concerning what’s true.” Here’s what I personally need to remember and repeat back to myself.

How do we become more spiritually alive? We need to own up to our condition. We need to connect up with God’s provision. We need dial up God’s blessings. And, here’s the fourth thing:

We need to sign up for God’s way of growth

2 Peter 1:5-7

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.

Look at verse 5 again:

2 Peter 1:5

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge;

The reason why so many Christians are so ineffective is that many folks have a magical view of faith. “All I need to do is accept Jesus and I will automatically grow.” They don’t realize that we must do something to become spiritually alive. Christ has given us his power and his promises. But spiritual life is a both-and process. It includes God’s activity and our activity; the divine and the human.

Peter uses exactly the same phrase in verse 10, where we read:

2 Peter 1:10

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble,

Peter uses the phrase “make every effort.” Some of your bibles might say “apply all diligence,” or giving all diligence. I like the NIV translation – “make every effort.” The NIV uses this phrase eight times in the New Testament – make every effort. So we read in Luke 13:24:

The late John White, who was an old and dear friend of mine, was a Christian psychiatrist who went to be with the Lord about 15 years ago, wrote one of the best books I’ve ever read on Christian growth and discipleship. It is called “The Fight.” We’re ordering copies of it in our bookstore. You can sign up for a copy. But what an appropriate title for becoming spiritually alive and for the Christian life – *The Fight*.

Spiritual growth is a struggle; it is a labor. We are salmon swimming upstream in this fallen world. If we coast and just go into neutral, we actually move backward in our Christian lives. The tendency of our own sin is to draw us backward. The tug of the world is drawing us backward. The opposition of Satan is pulling us backward. One major error in the church is to believe that growth is automatic. That God will somehow pick you up by the seat of your pants and throw you upstream. We’ve got to fight to swim upstream against our own sinful tendencies, Satan, and the world that constantly in our faces.

The problem, simply stated, regarding why it is that we Christians are not spiritually alive and, in fact, why we are not physically alive or financially alive, or emotionally alive, or relationally alive can be summed up with this one phrase:

We are not making every effort.

I love what Peter does here in verses 5-7:

2 Peter 1:5-7

⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to

perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.

He's not talking about adding to our faith in terms of salvation. Peter's not suggesting that Christian salvation is not by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Rather, he's talking to discouraged, depressed Christians – Christians who don't feel spiritually alive despite accepting Jesus as their Savior and Lord, Christians who are ineffective, Christians who are unproductive, Christians who are nearsighted – and he's telling those Christians that initial faith in Christ is not enough if we want to live vibrant, joyful, fully alive Christian lives.

How many Christians are just content to just stamp their ticket for heaven? I've trusted in Christ, I accepted Jesus as a child – that's enough. That's enough if you are content to be ineffective, unproductive, nearsighted and blind. But Peter said that we need to add to our initial faith other qualities – like goodness and knowledge and love. Peter is describing a kind of staircase that moves us up from one thing to another until we get to the top. He's describing the Christian life as being like a walk, where we add one foot to another. Like I always said, left foot, right foot, left foot.

To add these things to our lives, we need to sign up for God's way of growth. God's way of growth involves taking into our lives God's Word. If you currently do not have a plan for reading God's Word during this Fully Alive campaign, why not start a reading plan at our bookstore. We have a wonderful guide to the Bible called *Search the Scriptures*.

God's way of growth involves fasting. Fasting is a biblical and spiritual exercise that has been practiced by Christians for 2,000 years. Fasting may involve food for you, where you skip eating breakfast and lunch or breakfast, lunch and dinner on a particular day. But during this season of Lent, consider fasting from TV in the evening or social media and replace the time with prayer and worship.

Do some spiritual reading. Pick up a copy of the book called *The Fight or Sacred Pathways* by Gary Thomas.

Gary Thomas' book tells us that we are uniquely wired and we each have different ways of connecting up with the Lord.

Finally, here's the fifth thing:

We need join up with God's people

Last week, I said that it's easy to write down a goal. We've all made resolutions that we quickly broke. I'm going to read my Bible five days a week. I'm going to pray for 20 minutes a day. I'm going to lose 15 pounds or join a gym and actually go. As I said last

week, it's easy to write down a goal. What's really hard to do is accomplish those goals, to follow through. If we want to become more spiritually alive, indeed, if we want to become more fully alive in any area that I'll be talking about, we need to join up with God's people.

We humans beings are hugely impacted by peer pressure.

Proverbs 13:20

Walk with the wise and become wise,
for a companion of fools suffers harm.

We become like the people we hang around with. There are some fascinating studies regarding people's weight, and they say that the best predictor of people's weight is the weight of their closest relationships – their closest friends and family members. We are affected by peer pressure. If your closest circle has unhealthy eating habits or doesn't exercise, you're going to struggle to eat right and to exercise. If your closest circle never prays, never reads the Bible, you're going to struggle to pray and read the Bible and to engage in Christian fellowship. If we want to become spiritually alive, we need to be in a small group of people who are also pursuing the Lord. That's why I want to encourage you, if you're not part of a small group, you haven't joined one of our Fully Alive new HOST groups, go to a connection event right after the service. If you are able to HOST, if you can get 2-3 or more friends or family members to watch the Fully Alive videos and to go through our booklet then go to the lobby and sign up to HOST.

If you get into a circle of people who are really going after becoming Fully Alive, if you get involved in a group of people who are passionately pursuing a deeper life in Christ, they will impact you to also passionately pursue becoming spiritually alive. Let's pray.