



## NURTURE YOUR SPIRIT

By Rev. Will Nelken

*Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, CA, on Sunday, April 23, 2023*

"I'm famished! I could eat a horse—is there anything to eat?" When your body tells you it has depleted its resources—protein, vitamins, minerals, carbohydrates—listen to it!

But we have other desires besides our bodily cravings. The inner part of our lives also has needs.

*"Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole **spirit** and **soul** and **body** be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. God will make this happen, for He who calls you is faithful"* (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).

Many times "spirit" and "soul" are used interchangeably in common conversation, as though they were the same thing. However, according to the New Testament, they are distinct, as a brief word study will show.

In English, as well as the original languages of Scripture (Hebrew and Greek), the words for spirit, soul, and body are distinct, as are their meanings.

English	Greek (NT)	Hebrew (OT)
SPIRIT	PNEUMA	RUACH
SOUL	PSYCHE	NEPHESH
BODY	SOMA	MEAH

Both the Greek and Hebrew words translated *spirit* have the same original meanings of *breath* or *wind*. From the Greek *pneuma* we get the word *pneumatic* (air-powered).

You'll recognize the Greek word for *soul*, because it looks just like the English *psyche*, from which we get *psychology* (of the mind).

And the Greek *soma* brings us *somatic* (bodily) in English.

Man is a trinity—a three-part being—spirit, mind, and body.

We are all very familiar with the body, since it is material—we can see it and feel it. (As we age, we feel even more of it.)

But the spirit and soul are immaterial, invisible and more difficult for us to understand. The soul, however, can be felt—sometimes intensely—so we are more aware of our soul (desires, emotions, and thoughts).

In the Old Testament, the word soul was often used for the whole inner, immaterial aspect of our being (both mind and spirit). “Spirit” was mostly used to refer to the influence (from the outside) of invisible powers, either God or other forces.

### **Separate But Not**

Here's an important note: While we may speak of spirit, mind, and body as though they were three independent objects, they are not.

For example, my body requires three things from the outside to live: air, water, food. Without any one of them, I will perish. Without air, it is not just my lungs that will die; my whole body will die. Similarly, without food, it is not only my stomach that will succumb, but my whole body will die. We may think and speak about the functions of each separate organ, but in reality they are interconnected and interdependent.

(Think of how often we refer to our “spiritual life” as though we also have another kind of life. “For my spiritual life,” “For my spiritual well-being.” “Spiritually, I’m doing well.” Or we say, emotionally I’m doing okay, but physically I’m not so good.)

Sometimes, we even accept the lies that feelings are bad, or bodily appetites are bad, and that my spirit is the only good thing about us.

The truth is, once you are born again, your life becomes WHOLE, which means at one and the same time you are spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical—an integrated human being. (Granted, the wholeness does not become full or complete overnight, but the reality, and hopefully your awareness, of the THREE dimensions of human fullness is activated NOW.)

Here is a vital principle for your understanding: things that are described and addressed *separately* in Scripture (so that we may know about them and think about them) often are interconnected and interdependent, and do not actually function apart from one another.

Starting with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The human spirit, mind, and body.

The members of the Body of Christ.

Heaven and earth.  
Creation and the Covenant People of God.  
Fruit and gifts of the Spirit.  
The natural and the supernatural. And so on...

So, while we may think and speak distinctly about the functions of spirit, mind, and body, let's remember that they are *actually* interconnected and interdependent, and their functions are always collaborative. Your spirit does not function apart from your mind or body; your mind does not function apart from your body and spirit; your body cannot function apart from your spirit and mind. Not in this world.

The New Testament, post-Pentecost, is more specific than the Old Testament was, in order to give a fuller picture of reality.

I say, "New Testament," because the advent of Jesus Christ, including His death, burial, and resurrection launched a new relationship with God through the Spirit—what Jesus called being "born again." His sacrifice for us cancelled our sins and washed our consciences clean, permitting the Holy Spirit to dwell within us, fulfilling the ancient prophets' predictions of a "new covenant" in which God would put His Spirit into the hearts of humans.

And I say, "post-Pentecost," because the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (recorded in Acts 2) brought God's relationship with us to a level described as "fullness"—what Jesus referred to as the Spirit coming "upon" us with power.

*"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:8).*

There are three dimensions of relationship with God the Holy Spirit. Jesus described the first two when He told His disciples, *"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides **with you** and will be **in you**" (John 14:16-17).*

## **With You**

"With you" is the relationship the Spirit of our Creator God has with every living person, hovering as He did in the very beginning (Genesis 1:2), to produce something good, to lead each person to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. No one comes to Jesus unless the Spirit draws them, convicts them of sin, awakens faith in Christ, and converts their heart. "God with us" is working toward that very goal.

## **In You**

“In you” is the result of entrusting oneself to Jesus as Savior and Lord. When a person is “born again,” God’s Spirit takes up residence within. No longer just an outside influence, He becomes our inward inspiration and revelation. Every born again believer in Jesus has this kind of relationship with the Holy Spirit. But there’s more...

## **Upon You**

Jesus said, “*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come **upon you***” (Acts 1:8).

Indeed, the Spirit came upon the earliest disciples just a short time later (Acts 2:1-4), and subsequently on other groups of believers (Acts 10:44, 11:15, 19:6). The Spirit was already “in” them, but they needed the additional clothing of the Spirit “on” them, to release additional grace, gifts, and power for life and service.

Have you asked Jesus to pour His Spirit on you? Don’t you want *everything* He has for you?

## **Nurturing the Christian Life**

Now, humans are presented as a trinity—a three-part being—spirit, mind, and body. Each part needs input—nourishment.

How do you know when your body needs input (food or water)? You feel hunger or thirst. Appetite drives your body to find nourishment. Emotions may drive you to eat (in this “land of obesity”), but hunger is something else, a necessity of life.

Learning to distinguish between the body’s need (hunger) and the mind’s need for distraction (emotional eating) is one key to health and longevity.

How do you know when your mind needs input (information or direction)? Curiosity drives the mind to seek nourishment. Can you spell G-O-O-G-L-E?

Since emotions are also part of the mind’s activities, discomfort or confusion may also drive us to seek emotional support (nourishment). Learning to distinguish between the mind’s need for peace (felt as discomfort/disorientation) and the body’s need for activity (denying and sublimating feelings) is a key to mental and emotional health and strength.

## **Stop, Challenge, Choose**

We are familiar with the cries of both body and mind and are usually responsive, though not always in healthy ways. In both cases, a simple step toward greater health is to Stop, Challenge, and Choose.

Stop before you act on impulse.

Challenge yourself to consider the healthiest way to respond.

Choose what is best for your overall health.

## Nourishing Your Spirit

Well, how do you know when your spirit needs input? What is that even about? What input does your spirit require to nourish health? Two things: presence/fellowship and purpose.

How may we know when our spirit is in need of nourishment? A nagging sense of emptiness, or ambivalence, or uncertainty. Longing drives the spirit to find nourishment.

Mistakes in this unfamiliar terrain are common, but the Scripture guides us.

*“All things are lawful, but **not all things are profitable**. All things are lawful, but **not all things edify**. Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor”* (1 Corinthians 10:23-24).

The Amplified Bible clarifies the passage:

*“All things are legitimate [permissible—and we are free to do anything we please], but not all things are helpful (expedient, profitable, and wholesome). All things are legitimate, but not all things are **constructive [to character] and edifying [to spiritual life]**.”*

We hunger for knowledge, imagining therein lies what we’re missing (and sometimes we do need to know what is true), but depending on our knowledge leads in another direction.

*“Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies”* (1 Corinthians 8:1). What we think we know can cloud our understanding of what we need to know. Loving others builds us up. Not just them, but *us!*

## Presence Breeds Fellowship

*“What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed **our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ**”* (1 John 1:3).

God’s *presence* (fellowship) is invited by our listening ear and humble obedience. The presence (fellowship) of the church family is invited by our grace and loving actions.

Make love your aim. This not only builds up others, it also builds *your* spirit.

*“So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the **building up** of one another”* (Romans 14:19).

*“Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, **to his edification**. For even Christ did not please Himself” (Romans 15:1-3).*

*“For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him. Therefore encourage one another and **build up one another**, just as you also are doing” (1 Thessalonians 5:9-11).*

### **Purpose Arises With Growth**

Paul speaks of his apostolic authority in these terms: *“For even if I boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave **for building you up** and not for destroying you, I will not be put to shame” (2 Corinthians 10:8).*

*“For this reason I am writing these things while absent, so that when present I need not use severity, in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me **for building up** and not for tearing down” (2 Corinthians 13:10).*

*“Perhaps you think we’re saying these things just to defend ourselves. No, we tell you this as Christ’s servants, and with God as our witness. **Everything we do, dear friends, is to strengthen you**” (2 Corinthians 12:19).*

This apostolic service speaks to our spiritual need for *purpose*. If only all those who wield authority in this world did so with this aim.

Paul goes further to describe in similar terms the gifts which Jesus gave to the Church after His ascension:

*“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the **building up of the body of Christ**; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-13).*

*“Speaking the truth in love, we are to **grow up** in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for **the building up of itself in love**” (Ephesians 4:15-16).*

Learn to recognize those longings (in your life and in the lives of those around you) and then know what will meet that need.

As you seek to keep *yourself* well-nourished, consider these guides:

*“And now I commend you **to God and to the word** of His grace, which is able to **build you up** and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified”* (Acts 20:32).

*“One who **speaks in an unknown tongue** (a gift of the Spirit) **edifies himself**; but one who prophesies edifies the church. Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues...”* (1 Corinthians 14:4-5).

In the effort to nourish the spirit of *others*, consider this:

*“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is **good for edification** according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear”* (Ephesians 4:29). This has been a regular prayer of mine for many years; I urge you to make it yours, too.

Learn where and how to nurture your spirit. It is at least one-third of who you are!

I leave you with this instruction:

*“Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and **now being built up in Him** and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude”* (Colossians 2:6-7).

May God grant you wholeness—*shalom*.