

Rev Tim Perkins

May 13th 2020

“Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.” (Psalm 86: 11, NIV)

Dear Friends,

One of the things I have lived with for as long as I can remember is a sense of discontent in the core of my being, a sense that somehow my life is not all that it could be. In part, it flows from my understanding of what a life of faith in Jesus Christ looks like in the pages of the New Testament and how I then reflect upon the state of my own soul and how I seek to live out the life of Christ today. I constantly come face to face with the question of *“why do I not see God working in and through me, or in and through the Church, in some of the ways recorded in Scripture?”*

What has happened to the depth of passion for Jesus? What has become of the daily emphasis upon our core spiritual practices of prayer, studying Scripture, breaking bread, fasting, sharing in deep fellowship and study with other Christ-followers to mention but a few? Where is the desire to speak of our faith to others and to witness to it through lives of service filled with the power of God and the gifts of the Holy Spirit?

That is not to say that there isn't anything good and godly taking place in and through me or in and through the Church because our world would be profoundly poorer if it weren't for the Body of Christ at work in countless amazing ways. It is just that I feel disconnected somehow from what I discover in the pages of the Bible.

And I am finding this sense of discontent growing during our new experience of life. Perhaps it is because the pace of life has become a little slower and I have a bit more time for self-reflection. That certainly seems to be increasingly the case in society with the reported increase in people searching online for topics such as *“how to pray.”*

I think the Psalmist captures my plight in a single phrase (which perhaps reveals to me how far I still must travel when it takes me so many words to explain it!) *“Give me an undivided heart”* is the Psalmist's plea – that sense of inner integrity from which everything else flows. That is what I long for and yet I find myself agreeing far too easily with the words of St Paul in Romans *“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do, I do not do, but what I hate I do.”* (7:15)

This last week I have read some deeply profound words that have shed some light on my dilemma. They come from the book, *“Renovation of the Heart in Daily Practice,”* by Dallas Willard and Jan Johnson. Allow me to share them with you:

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The Methodist Church

“Years ago when I began attending twelve-step meetings, I felt great relief at hearing about the twelve-step goal of ‘becoming the same person all the time.’ I felt as if I were many persons. I wanted one thing one minute and another thing the next minute. I wanted to do the right thing, but I also wanted to get unmet needs met, and that might take a little exaggerating or manipulation. Many times I said and did things I later regretted.

With this goal in mind, I began working on having an undivided heart...To do so, I tried to take all my desires and focus them on God. It took a while to understand that the different aspects of myself needed retraining (reformation or, actually, transformation) before I could follow through to be the same person all the time...

The human heart is the executive centre of a human life. This is where decisions and choices are made. Heart, spirit, and will refer to the same fundamental component of the person, but they do so under different aspects. Will refers to that component’s ‘power’ to ‘initiate’, to create, to bring about what did not exist before. Spirit refers to its fundamental ‘nature’ as distinct from physical reality. And heart refers to its ‘position’ in the human being, as the centre or core to which every other component of the self owes its proper functioning.

This heart or will or spirit interacts with the six basic aspects of individual human beings.

- 1. Thoughts (images, concepts, judgements, inferences)*
- 2. Feelings (sensations, emotions)*
- 3. Choice (will, decisions, character)*
- 4. Body (actions, interaction with the physical world)*
- 5. Social context (personal and structural relations with others)*
- 6. Soul (the factor that integrates all the above to form one life)*

The ideal is for the whole person to do only what the heart directs. Spiritual formation in Christ is the ‘process’ leading to that ideal, and its result is love of God with ‘all’ of the heart, soul, mind, and strength and love of neighbour as oneself. Each aspect or dimension of the person will be a source of weakness or strength to the whole person, depending on the condition it is in. The condition it is in will depend on the heart. A person who is ‘prepared’ and ‘capable’ of responding to the situations of life in ways that are good and right is a person whose soul is in order, under the direction of a well-kept heart, in turn under the direction of God.”¹

So, how is it with your soul? Do you allow God to teach you God’s ways? And perhaps, most importantly in these days, what are you learning about yourself and your character that reveals whether you have a divided or undivided heart?

If you want to talk through any of your responses to these questions, then please do not hesitate to contact either myself or your own Minister.

With every blessing,

Rev Tim Perkins

¹ Willard D & Johnson J, *Renovation of the Heart in Daily Practice*, P. 24-25, NavPress, 2006.