

'It is the Spirit that gives Life'



When life is a little pear shaped and we are feeling frayed at the edges, less able to cope and in need of a pick me up – What is our go to habit? A hug, a stroke of the dog, a chocolate bar, buying a new outfit or a shopping spree in the garden centre, driving the car and putting on loud music, a good long walk away from everyone else? What restores your equilibrium?

Recently we have heard a lot about mental health and how we need to look after it. We know that the heaping up of piles of expectations, requirements and stresses on ourselves can lead to our bodies and minds overloading. They start to tell us that they cannot carry on and in their own way demand we do something to change our lifestyle but, what about our spiritual health?

By spiritual health- we are talking about our capacity as human beings to make sense of, and be at peace with, ourselves and our place and purpose in life, and so have the potential to be at peace with others. Our spiritual health enables us to absorb and reflect upon brokenness and sorrow as well as

experience life in the fullest sense. For Christians, it's about our sense of God's presence and our relationship with him. As Jesus says, 'It is the spirit that gives life' (John 6:63a).

Possibly everybody has times when their spiritual health gets run down. Maybe you can think of a time in your life when this has happened and, you have become aware of it as being very noticeable.... Maybe that time is now.

We all have a Spiritual battery- and like all batteries it needs charging. So, how do we look after that battery?

There is the 'Top up'. Those of you have a mobile phone, will be familiar with the phrase. Your phone is still functioning but, you 'top it up'- give it a quick recharge and it's ready to go again. Some batteries diminish in capacity with continual topping up. We too can top up spiritually with the once a week, long walk, or a church service or a family gathering that gives warmth and support. It's feels really good at the time and it can even keep us going until the next 'top up' but, we are always in danger of using up our reserves and finding ourselves in need of a complete recharge. It can be a struggle for some and, is this really living life in its fullest sense? I suggest that sooner or later, we will find the battery is flat- then we need to stop working, take a holiday, go on retreat, start over when we are able and ready and supported.

With mobile phones, it's better to have a planned strategy to ensure that your phone can function all the time. So, what about applying this to our spiritual battery? Aiming not to rely on top ups and not to get so depleted we need a recharge but, instead, making room in our lives for the spiritual. This involves both the inclusion of activities that support the development of a living faith as well as adopting attitudes and approaches to life that promote our spiritual health.

Paul writing to the Ephesians, gives them advice on how to 'be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power'; he is explaining how they can translate their beliefs into everyday life. Paul understands that can we get stuck on this. He uses the phrase 'spiritual evil' as an umbrella term for everything that might undermine our ability to live a life of faith based on God's values. He tells the Christians at Ephesus to stand firm by taking on the 'armour of God'.

The pieces of armour are how Isaiah describes the Messiah in the Old Testament and they are the things we see in Jesus as the Messiah. We see righteousness and faith as well as the truth, salvation and peace that Jesus brings. Paul says, base how you live on taking up God's offer to save us from despair, brokenness and being without meaning; make use of scripture, pray to God and remember to pray for each other; be individuals who are part of a community who together navigate daily living with God; be guided by Jesus.

In this traditional holiday period and a time of staycations, perhaps we could all take time to reflect upon how we look after our spiritual batteries. A little planned management of our spiritual resources can be a great help in our lives. It has taken me many years to appreciate to see the truth in this and I am still working on it. We will always have times when we experience spiritual lows and highs but, our capacity to tap into our spiritual resources will be there to provide us with a means of hope and strength.

An important and final note: what to do when we think we have a dead battery. We know that an actual battery can become no longer usable-defunct unless you crush and destroy it to be recycled. Our spiritual battery or our Soul is not like this. It does not have a shelf life. Each soul is a free creation out of love by God, each soul is created for an individual life – it is of the spiritual world and yet is placed in a physical body. Our soul can survive the death of our physical body so, even when we are left feeling soulless, it remains waiting to be recharged. Even when we are totally unaware of it, our souls long for God and God waits for us.

Melanie Seward

Why not?

- If you have access to the internet: Watch the video, 'Overview of Pauls Letter to the Ephesians', part of the Bible Project (8 minutes).
- Read Ephesians as a whole book- only six chapters.