

HOW TO BEGIN TO SEE AGAIN



A worthy goal for each of us is learning to see.

Have you ever puzzled over those statements in the Bible about people who had eyes but could not see? Tried to figure out the occasional exhortation for people to see things that are right before their eyes? It isn't really that difficult.

We use the same figure of speech still. "Open your eyes, man!" somebody tells his friend. "Can't you see she's in love with you?" Or perhaps it is a parent to a child: "The answer is already there, if you will just open your eyes to see it."

In the Bible and in everyday conversation, statements such as these seldom have anything to do with physical eyesight. The issue isn't glasses, contacts, or laser surgery. It almost always has to do with perception and understanding. It is the sort of seeing we have in mind with the word "insight."

A truly spiritual life is to sense and share God's presence at all times. It's during dinner with your family, in the workplace,

and while negotiating a crowded parking lot. Jesus' life tells us that too!

My concern is that we tend to reduce spirituality to pious sentimentality. So I'm spiritual when I calm down after cursing and giving a hand gesture to the brash kid who cut me off in traffic. You are spiritual after the kids are asleep and you can do your daily Bible reading. Families are spiritual when they remember to thank God for getting them through last year's health or financial crisis.

No, authentic spirituality is so deeply embedded in geography and history that it plays out in the common events of being human. A spiritual life is one that is so oriented to God that its work, play, and relationships reflect His presence.

Spirituality isn't calming down after cursing and gesturing; it is being under the control of the Spirit to touch your brake, let the immature driver through and not lose your cool. It isn't shoving the kids out of your way; it is treating them the way Jesus treated little children and immature disciples. It is less thanking God for getting your family through tough times than reflecting His presence during them. God is present always and everywhere and a spiritual life knows that.

Jesus' birth reminds us that the Word became flesh. The invisible, Holy God was made manifest in tangible, bodily form. Thus, salvation is not a process of our refinement into pure spirits but God's gentle reorientation of our minds and hearts, relationships and actions with His will. He redeems us by working through us to affirm and help others. He saves us by making His word become flesh in us.

In a life that is spiritual, everything tangible is both holy and matters to God. It takes you from the invisible to the visible.

Using the coming months as a learn-to-see time challenges each of us to view reality more spiritually. Yes, we pray for the Kingdom to come. But we can do more in the meanwhile than just tread water. We can submit to spiritual discipline in the same way athletes accept physical training and conditioning.

Take a sticky note and print these words in bold letters: "Your task today is to honor God in all you do!" Put the note on the

first thing you will see in the morning — coffee cup, makeup or shaving mirror, computer screen. When you see that note every morning, breathe this simple prayer: "Heavenly Father, let my eyes be open to your presence and your will throughout this day."

Then taking your shower or eating breakfast can be an exercise in gratitude. Walking outside lets you reflect on the beauty of God's creation. Hearing music or seeing children on their way to school is His invitation to joy. Getting caught in traffic can be turned into a prayer that God teach you patience. Dealing with students, customers, or co-workers can be your opportunity to serve them in Christ's name. Celebrate their successes. Be a friend in their distress or discouragement.

Before going to bed each night — perhaps with these two questions written on a bookmark in your Bible — ask:

When did I feel most alive to God and others today?
When did I most feel like life was being drained from me?

End your day by thanking God for the former and surrendering the latter to His grace.

This is no "magic formula" for spirituality. It is nothing more or less than the daily routine of many Christians whose goal is to grow in likeness to Jesus.

This simple plan in 2006 should be to open your eyes to things you have been missing.

But I tell you, open your eyes. Look at the people. They are like fields ready for harvesting now. (John 4:35 ERV)