

SPIRITUALITY FOR SMARTIES

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SUMMARY

Dallas Willard lays out a definition and framework for a better understanding of spirituality. He discusses it both in a Christian and secular context and adds some powerful thoughts to how spirituality intersects with intellectualism.

ASSESSING THE TEXT

"Spirituality' is now an acceptable and even a stylish presence in our cultural life, including the university or college. It can come in the form of religion, in some traditionally recognized sense. Religion can be, though it need not be, practiced as a form of spirituality, but much of spirituality's contemporary acceptance is due to its breaking free from religion in the public mind."

Do you think this divorce of religion and spirituality is healthy?

How can one be religious but not spiritual or vice versa? What does that look like?

"As you observe the phenomena of spirituality broadly you see that spirituality meets two basic needs of human life: identity and empowerment."

How does the Gospel uniquely offer a sense of identity and empowerment for us?

"However, spirituality on the campus is not treated with intellectual seriousness. It is like a hobby or a sentimental attachment. ("Oh, she likes bears.") Coming in under the flag of diversity entails that it shall not be treated with intellectual seriousness, nor, indeed, thought of in intellectual terms at all."

What is the danger in divorcing spirituality from intellectualism?

"If the spiritual is impersonal, you can freely approach it in an engineering mentality. That is, you find out how to "work it," and then you use it for your purposes."

How do we sometimes treat God in an impersonal way?

How can this become a stumbling block in our relationships with him?

"If the spiritual is deemed to be personal, however, whether it is a "familiar spirit," a fairy Godmother, or Jehovah, you treat it as a person. It has choice and projects of its own, it can decide to do good or to do evil. It has moral personality and you must come to terms with that. An engineering approach can be tried, as is

common with most historical cases of the use of idols, but what comes of it is at the discretion of the spirit or spirits involved. “

Why is it important for us to understand God as a personal, rather than impersonal, being?

“A Spirituality will be, in general, a way of living that draws, in significant ways, upon invisible, non-physical powers to bring about events and conditions in the course of daily existence. It will not be just an outward form of life—as religion sometimes is— but is primarily an inward and hidden source, no matter how it may be associated (or not) with outward forms and activities. “

What goes wrong when our spiritual lives become too inward?

What about when they become outward but lack any inward characteristics?

“A spirituality is a definite sort of thing, with a nature of its own, and with relations to other kinds of things and to how one lives life: how one treats oneself and others, lives in the family and community, goes to work, and thinks and acts in the political and international arena. “

How does the Gospel typically impact these areas of your life on a daily basis?

“In the Christian version of personalized spirit and spirituality, the spiritual life takes on the character of a personal relationship between individuals, with the attendant features of reciprocal attention, care, provision, assistance or service, emotional interaction, expectations, comfort, joy, and development or growth. “

How do the basics of human social interaction help us better understand the mechanics of spiritual growth?

“Devotion to Jesus Christ and to what he is doing in world history then and now is the center of a distinctively Christian version of spirituality. “

What dangers arise when we remove Jesus as the centerpiece of our faith and replace him with other things like a message of mere moral purity?

“In thinking about spirituality and the academy, it should be understood that the work of intellect and of the researcher or teacher is not to get people to believe things or do things. It is to bring understanding, awareness, truth and evidence to light.”

How do we walk this line between exposing others to our Christian faith without crossing into inappropriate persuasion? How can these concepts help us be more effective at evangelism overall?