

Passage: John 1:1-14

Series at Ethnos: Passion for spirituality

Take Home Line: **Will you passionately engage with Jesus? (For both Christians and non-Christians)**

<Open in Prayer>

When I think of the word spirituality what honestly comes into my mind is a monk sitting atop a mountain meditating about life. What if spirituality was actually closer than that? What if spirituality was a day-to-day rhythm that the soul needs in order to function not only as a Christian but also as a human being? And that if a divine force or being exists there must be some type of engagement or attractive/interesting character that draws us in. It gets a bit more personal than that, there is a God offering humanity a new relationship for life, to engage in the spiritual matters of our time, to live with purpose. Matters such as food for the poor, justice for the oppressed, healing for the sick, and hope for the broken or for some it is to make a difference with our lives, to count as something in this world. Spirituality then must be understood as knowing. It is a knowing of who this God is that offers a deep spirituality. Who is it that satisfies us wholly so that a passion can emerge from our Christian lives? A passion to change the world we live in, in Jesus' name. And finding our role in this linear history that God has for us? Our topic today is a passion for spirituality a continuation of our passion series here at Ethnos.

Our culture is dying for a valid answer to spirituality whether we know it or not figuratively and literally. The demand for spirituality is growing as seen in the 110,813 books on spirituality from Amazon, movies addressing spirituality, nature music at \$17/cd, topics at church, and the college campus. I know the last demand personally as an InterVarsity staff worker; students yearn for spirituality. In our post-modern society people want to see their lives mean something through experience so they dabble in a little bit of spirituality here and there, a bit of this religion and a bit of that religion. What's more is that we are relativistic too, what is true for you is not always true for everyone else.

Spirituality has many obstacles. As the church we face these obstacles constantly, our role is to dig our feet deep into spirituality so we can find words to speak about spirituality in a faithful manner. What I mean is to understand with both knowledge and feeling the role of spirituality in our Christian lives and to represent that for the world outside the church. So far the track record has not been great with Christians and non-Christians. But I believe there is a common ground that we can discover in Jesus Christ. With either controversy or passion, we need to understand how Jesus has really become the intersection for the world's growing spirituality shown by his engagement with humanity. I know that sounds weird because non-Christians might not fully understand who Jesus

is, but Jesus knows the world because he has come into it, he has engaged it. When I got engaged to Anna it was a solid commitment that I promised to give myself to her, to serve and care for her above my own desires. No matter what new things I discovered about Anna that I might not have liked say squeezing the toothpaste instead of rolling it for example, I made a commitment to love her. God has made somewhat of a similar commitment to humanity when he engaged us by coming into our world from heaven. Except God knew us in a way I could never know my wife Psalm 139:15 says, "My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths". I can promise you that no one else will ever know you the way God can, no parent, boyfriend, girlfriend, husband or wife.

Our role in spirituality then is to embrace this God that engages us. We are *more* motivated to understand the spiritual than we tend to think. One of my college students wrote this on his journey of spirituality from our recent IV trip <Harris' letter>. Jesus spoke to the Jewish community in their search for truth also in John 8:32 saying, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." The Jewish people responded saying "but we are free" and they knew in their history what slavery was (see Exodus or the movie Prince of Egypt for cross reference...the prior is more accurate). Jesus was referring to living a life under sin and how that is like slavery. They didn't get it. But in John 14:6 to his disciples Jesus says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." What an audacious thing to say in the face of Jewish people that have been following a monotheistic faith this whole time. Jesus is mentioning that he offers something deeper; a commitment to reveal what spirituality is really about. And yes he knows God the Father personally.

The current problem with spirituality is that we don't understand spirituality anymore, so I want to offer a possible solution in two points.

1. Spirituality is about knowing Jesus.

Read John 1:1-14

Now just to clarify, when I say God engages us, I mean the Father, Son and Holy Spirit has come to know us. Not just Jesus. Bear with me for a moment because this is important. Yet, knowing Jesus leads us into a deeper understanding of God through Jesus' relationship to the Father and the Holy Spirit. It is important to know that we would not gain any information about God if it were not for Jesus. "He was with God in the beginning" verse 1. Jesus knows **who** he is and is constantly self-identifying **who** he is in relation to, as seen in the gospels "My Father... If you knew my Father, I praise you Father". So in relationship we understand **who** God is. This sheds light on the intention of God's desire, love and marriage with humanity not just as some cosmic force who wants to wipe us out or fix our

messes. But God is a loving Father who has committed to send his son as a messenger to reveal more about himself. <video clip>

In John 1 what stands out to me is "the Word" in Greek it is translated as *Logos* basically saying God is the Word and the *Logos* was with the Father and the *Logos* came from the Father seen in verses 1 and 14. We conclude that Jesus is the Word and that from the beginning Jesus was with/was God before ever coming onto earth. There is history to why *Logos* is used, scholars say it is because in the past God spoke through prophets to bring a word to his people (Thomas Oden, *Systematic Theology Volume 2* pg 67). Now in this John passage the word of God has come in flesh and blood. In Heb 1:1-2 it says, "in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son"...God's word is spoken and revealed in the Son. Jesus is then the living Word of God. So to recap Jesus (who is one with the Father and Holy Spirit) comes down as a representative to humanity as a human to engage and transform us. And there are five places in John's account that specifically point at Jesus' coming onto earth to prove it:

1. Where light shining in the darkness verse 5, paralleling back at Genesis 1:2
2. Verse 9 a coming into the world
3. Verse 10 He was in the world
4. Verse 11, He came to that which was his own
5. Verse 14 the Word becoming flesh.

So God pursues us for engagement. Our 110,813 books on spirituality from Amazon could never reach an understanding of God unless God reveals himself to us. Jesus is that revealing of God.

Jesus shows up in a particular ethnicity, in a particular context, in a particular time, and in a particular location. He does what people would call crazy for the Jewish community in Galilee by healing the sick, calling the dead to rise, talking to sinners, making the blind see, saying he is God. God does this because we have missed out on his purposes due to sin. Sin is missing God's mark. And because we missed out we try to make up for it, it's a natural human reaction to try and make up for our mistakes. But this world offers only dissatisfaction in life, brokenness in relationships, addictions, pseudo-spirituality and death. Just turn on the news. Haven't you ever thought there was more to this world than what you are currently living for? Even in your spirituality?

His purpose for us is freedom, transformation and life, we were meant to live for so much more. Doing things our own way never really works out. From our first sinners, Adam and Eve, to Alan and Anna we need divine intervention to be reminded about why we were made. Without Jesus the hunger pains exist in attempts to justify evil and suffering in the world. We resort to blaming God, publishing spiritual books, basically anything that turns the mirror away from us.

A prominent Christian minister named N.T. Wright says,

“We should expect that in the quest for spiritual life many people will embrace options that are, to put it no more strongly for the moment, less than what would actually be best for them. People who have been starved of water for a long time will drink anything, even if it is polluted...There are, of course, other ways of explaining both the hunger for spirituality and the strange things people sometimes do to satisfy it” N.T. Wright (Simply Christian pg 25).

If the bible is true and “all things were made through him” (John 1:3) why then do we even try to understand this world without God? It's like drinking polluted water when there is a fresh, bubbling, pure mountain spring right around the corner.

There is someone out there that understands how this world works, how we work, because “all things were made through him” our role should be to know this person not as a historic figure but in daily discovery. I have known Anna since Jr. High school and I am still learning new things about her. Our relationship should continue to seek understanding. And so spirituality is about passionately seeking out Jesus as he seeks us.

Spirituality is about Jesus. Understanding what Jesus needed to do in our world affects the way we talk to our friends about God, spend time to pray, go to church, talk to our spouses, relate to co-workers, read the bible and worship. Jesus transforms our whole being and to ignore such an action from God would be dishonest or frustrating. Let's take for example Christian worship, N.T. Wright says, “When we begin to glimpse the reality of God, the natural reaction is to worship him. Not to have that reaction is a fairly sure sign that we haven't yet really understood who he is or what he's done” (Simply Christian Pg143). I get stuck in the routine of worship sometimes by just attending. For example with musical worship we sing at Ethnos, “You Alone are God” we should actually be responding to that reality. The reality we are singing says God is eternally sovereign, we are not God, and our way must be abandoned for God's way. This reality that prophets use to speak of “authority resting upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this” (Isa 9:6-7). Only God can do **that, God alone**. But it sounds like we are singing, “You Alone should be God”. It is not that if we truly believed in every worship song sung to God that our worship would be that much greater as if it were about us. The matter is, is if we understand the depth and power of the lyrics *and* to whom the worship is addressed.

So why isn't our church responding at that reality? Well I agree with N.T. Wright that it is because we are showing signs that we “haven't yet really

understood who he is or what he's done". I constantly forget God's role in my spirituality especially when there is difficulty in my life, when something difficult happens, or when things are going just fine. Like getting a cold I begin to show symptoms of congestion, sneezing, and coughing. My symptoms are: the spiritual walk becomes frustrating, picking up a bible is more difficult than a remote, my faith seems more checklist based, I move away from community, I get busy with work or school, I quickly become angry at others, my thoughts are not pure, I lose hope in my life, my failures and losses stare back at me, I turn to sin and not God...Even as a full time minister this describes my life, what is scary about this is that I begin to get selfish thinking well this is the God I know and God just wants a checklist from me. But why would anyone ever follow a God like that? We would just keep failing. One time I came to Ethnos and shared in prayer groups that I really struggled getting up and coming to church. This was my 3rd year on staff as a minister and the person to my right began to pray for my salvation.

Worship (which is not limited to song) is only one example of a dying passion for spirituality. Prayer, Scriptures, Community, Reflection, Solitude and Silence are others. Our passion for spirituality should stem from knowing a **God that wants to meet us in prayer, the God that wants to speak out to us in Scripture, and the God that comfort us in community.** God desires to engage us in our spirituality. He has decided to do this. What we can do on a practical front is train our bodies to know God. Spiritual training prepares our souls to meet with God. James Bryan Smith author of *The Good and Beautiful God* comments on Christian spirituality, "I have come to believe that the problem is not that we do not want change, nor is the problem that we are not trying to change. The problem is that we are not training. We have never been taught a reliable pattern of transformation" (Smith, pg 20). Smith has "soul training exercises" or what other books have called "spiritual disciplines" that you can practically apply into your life. There is not enough time to go into each exercise but get the book. If you're interested you can talk to me afterward about how to get it. As we understand our spirituality as knowing God, the world begins to take in glimpses of heaven on earth.

2. Spirituality is about bridging heaven and earth

Jesus is uniting both heaven and earth as John 1:1 depicts. Jesus has become the image of the invisible God, a mystery that has now been revealed. So what did Jesus have to say to humanity once his presence was revealed? What truth did the God of creation have to share with his people? The very first proclamation **from Jesus** was, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." Mark 1:15 Heaven has literally come down to earth and God announces

his kingdom or the way the world should be in proclamation format. Like the inauguration of a King who returns to his people Jesus calls for a change of allegiance a call to repentance. In Jesus we have this bridging of heaven on earth.

Our role as Christians in the pursuit of spirituality is to move out of our old narratives and into the new story of God's Kingdom reign on earth. An old narrative might be that your spiritual life is limited to reading your bible. Our conversations can happen like "how is your spiritual life going?" response: "well I haven't read my bible in awhile". Scripture is vital to spirituality but engaging God is more dynamic. Spirituality is not a checklist to follow God. This makes secular society feel guilty when coming to church like in order to be Christian they need to read the entire bible, use God-talk, look perfect, not swear, and not miss church on Sunday. Our spirituality is centered on Jesus who the Scriptures were written about. The new story would be to understand the Scriptures as an account of God who fulfills his promise to Israel, saves humanity, and unfolds the new kingdom on earth. Who do you understand Jesus to be?

<Summarized points>

"With Jesus, God's rescue operation has been put into effect once and for all. A great door has swung open in the cosmos which can never again be shut. It's the door to the prison where we've been kept chained up. We are offered freedom: freedom to experience God's rescue for ourselves, to go through the open door and explore the new world to which we now have access. In particular, we are all invited—summoned, actually—to discover, through following Jesus, that this new world is indeed a place of justice, spirituality, relationship, and beauty, and that we are not only to enjoy it as such but to work at bringing it to birth on earth as in heaven. In listening to Jesus, we discover whose voice it is that has echoed around the hearts and minds of the human race all along." (N.T. Wright *Simply Christian*, pg 92).

Challenge: **Will you passionately engage with Jesus?** Lift your hands up and receive a prayer of blessing to step into your spiritual lives with a renewed passion of the God that desires to know you.