

bread for the journey

Spiritual Maturity

I have been thinking about spiritual maturity since the beginning of my ministry at Rosecrance Health Network eleven years ago.

Patients come to us in a fragile and spiritually vulnerable condition and tend not to be what we would call spiritually viable. They are at the beck and call of all the demons which come out to tease—demons such as self will, narcissism, impatience and doubt. Lately, I have been reflecting upon some of the spiritual disciplines including surrender, humility and submission to the authorities. These are only a few of the symptoms of spiritual maturity—soul fiber necessary to get us through the trials and tribulations of everyday life.

Unfortunately, soul fiber is not a high priority in a culture that emphasizes the physical not the spiritual dimension of human existence. You cannot get through an evening of television watching without being sold a sexual enhancement or cholesterol pill you simply cannot live without. Or, if you don't get on this particular exercise regimen using this particular equipment, you will be a fat sloppy specimen of a human being. Then the advertiser regales you with "before" and "after" shots of people who have lost zillions of pounds by using this machine or being on that diet. Heck, you don't need all that stuff. Have gall bladder surgery and "catch your death of pneumonia" and you can lose 20 pounds in a month. Just ask me.

Good health is defined by physical appearance and body function. Attention to the soul is secondary. This is commonplace

but wrong headed. You can look like Arnold Schwarzenegger in his prime or Stefi Graf in hers and still be a complete goofball—but that's all right as long as you look good. Our well-being must include serious and joyful attention to the needs of the soul.

So, think with me about the development of an exercise regimen that will enhance the following signs and symptoms of spiritual maturity:

Solitude. Spiritually mature persons are not afraid to be alone with their thoughts and questions such as: "What does God want me to do with my life and am I doing it?" and "Is there a purpose for my life other than showing up?" It is true. Half of life is simply showing up. But, what are we showing up with?"

Community. We need to be with fellow soul travelers. We need solitude but we also need to be a part of something bigger and more purposeful than our own stuff. Church, volunteer work, community projects and recovery meetings are examples of places where we can be a part of something larger than the noses on our faces.

Acceptance of others. One of the most egregious habits spiritually immature people display is the conviction that they must tell anyone within earshot what they ought to think and believe about God and/or the meaning of life. Spiritually mature people accept and celebrate the faith traditions of others without selling out or compromising their own.

Forgiveness. Every one of us has experienced being taken advantage of. We've all been dissed, hurt or abused. Some have gone through terrible unspeakable misery at the hands of others. Resentment, a grudge bearing spirit, and an insidious desire for revenge are commonplace residuals. St. Paul once said that love has a poor memory for the wrongs done to us. Spiritually


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mature people find a way to move on with their lives without renting space in their soul to those who have hurt them. They find a way to forgive those who have hurt them.

The “God” thing. Spiritually mature people understand God is bigger than a mere concept, larger than an intellectual statement, and infinitely more mysterious than simple proof of existence. Spiritually mature people “sense” and know intuitively there is a Presence of something or Someone more powerful and real in their lives than merely what they can see, touch or hold.

Gratitude. Spiritually mature people see life as a gift. They understand they are not sui generis or self-made. Certain faith traditions encourage adherents to be in awe of the natural. How anyone can observe a red cardinal in the dead of a barren winter without saying, “Wow!” is beyond me. There are tons of reasons to be suspicious, cynical, doubting and unbelieving. (Why do bad things happen to good people? Why so much suffering?) But there is more in this life that points to beauty, love and the deep things of the soul. It produces great joy to know peace is still a goal for the human community, justice for all is still an issue, and the need to feed the hungry and clothe the naked is a priority which makes us a human community.

Narcissism and the bigger picture. Spiritually mature people understand they are not the center of the universe, know they are not God’s pet project, and recognize they are equipped with soulful sonar telling them there is something larger in the universe than entropy—the seemingly relentless spiraling down of energy, good will and life itself.

Contentment versus complacency. Spiritually mature people know they cannot stay in one place spiritually. Life is a journey. They learn acceptance of things they cannot change, and they are motivated to change what they can. Our minds and spirits grow over the years, or they devolve because we do not tend to them. Undisciplined souls becoming de-conditioned spirits. Spiritually mature people push the envelope and are into the adventure of knowing and understanding all they can about God and His purposes. 



The Rev. Dr. William Lenters, Chaplain

Rosecrance offers the best opportunity for lasting recovery for adolescents, adults and their families. If you know someone who needs help, please call us at 815.391.1000 or 888.9 AT LAST. www.rosecrance.org.

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is a bi-monthly news and views letter from Rev. Dr. William Lenters, Chaplain at Rosecrance Treatment Centers. Bread for the Journey is written on behalf of people who live with addictions. Together, and by God's grace, we will try to make a difference.

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