

**NORMAL? Finding Spiritual Equilibrium in a**

NCAC Sunday School Class Summer 2021

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**Overall Class Objective:** To gain biblical perspective on maintaining spiritual health in a context of prolonged, disorienting circumstances.

**Class Overview**

1. Discuss the general effects of Covid in our culture.
2. Identify some aspects of Covid's emotional/psychological impact.
3. Explore the spiritual consequences of the pandemic among believers.
4. Examine how we get off balance spiritually.
5. Delineate the nature of the Christian life.
6. Consider what constitutes spiritual health.
7. Determine what we can do to renew our spiritual wellness.

**Notes****What in the world happened?**

Coronavirus was first reported in China in December 2019.

Almost 3.7 million have died worldwide including over 610 thousand deaths in the US.

One in every five people in America have lost a friend or loved one to covid.

**List some of the effects the pandemic has had on life and culture generally.**

Attempts to deal with the pandemic have resulted in:

State restrictions on businesses, churches and social gatherings

Social isolation

Unemployment or underemployment

Some people working from home

Economic slow down

Schools closed or online

Child care challenges

More time at home

Use of online resources for work and entertainment (350 million participated in Zoom meetings in 2020)

Vaccines became available

Paul's testimony regarding adverse circumstances: (a reflection of spiritual equilibrium)

<sup>10</sup> I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. <sup>11</sup> Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. <sup>12</sup> I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. <sup>13</sup> I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

## **Identify some of the ways people been affected emotionally/psychologically during this time?**

Stress

Fear/anxiety

Depression

Fatigue

Confusion

Frustration/anger

Polarization – division over masks, social distancing, state restrictions and vaccines

“There has been something fundamentally apocalyptic about the COVID-19 pandemic: it has uncovered things about modern life that had previously remained unseen. From the fragility of our sense of security to the promises and perils of modern science, from the fractured condition of our social attachments to the alarmingly conspiratorial habits plaguing much of the American public, the hidden has surely been made manifest as a result of the pandemic.”

## **What have been some of the spiritual consequences of the pandemic in the lives of believers?**

Increased sense of spiritual isolation

Less care given or received

Less accountability

Less discipleship

Spiritual disciplines replaced by digital entertainment

Solitude

Silence

Fasting

Sabbath

Humility

Submission

Bible reading

Worship

Prayer

Spiritual relationships

Personal Reflection

Service

“One thing that has been vividly unearthed is the American church’s relatively weak commitment to regular attendance of Sunday worship. According to Barna research, approximately one in three Christians have stopped attending church altogether (whether in person or online) during the pandemic. An additional third have admitted to streaming a different church service online other than their own—digitally “church hopping,” basically—reflecting a certain consumeristic mindset endemic to much of the evangelical church.” Peter Newman

“Surveys suggest that even devoted people of faith will face lingering spiritual challenges. Online church viewership was spotty among casual and committed Christians alike. Daily Bible reading dropped last year as soon as people stopped connecting with their church communities. More than half of churchgoing Christians said they had not checked in with others from their congregation during the pandemic.” Kate Shellnutt

## What are common factors that can cause us to get off balance spiritually?

Circumstantial factors

### Distraction

There is readily available to us a seemingly endless parade of “interesting” information, stimulating opportunities and widely varied entertainment. Though in themselves, they may not be necessarily evil, they can be powerful agents in displacing what is most valuable from our lives.

*“Americans are inundated with options overdosing on opportunities.” Grant Howard*

*“It is funny how mortals always picture us as putting things into their minds: in reality our best work is done by keeping things out.” C.S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters*

### Change

Even innocuous or benign changes in our lives can disrupt our patterns and habits especially the longer those changes persist. The new normal to which we adapt might not retain spiritual practices previously present in our life. In such circumstances we can be inclined to use these occasions of change as an excuse for our spiritual decline.

### Affliction

Affliction is a specific type of change. Affliction involves some kind of physical or emotional suffering that can easily exacerbate our anxieties, dissipate our energy and obscure our focus. We may not feel we have the physical or emotional energy to read or pray or worship or serve as we had been.

*“There is nothing like suspense and anxiety for barricading a human's mind against the Enemy [God]. He wants men to be concerned with what they do; our business is to keep them thinking about what will happen to them.” C.S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters*

### Persistent Sin

Persistent sin is never static, it always progressively degrades the space it occupies in one's heart. It is by nature, infectious, metastasizing throughout our spiritual life.

<sup>27</sup> Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup> Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. <sup>29</sup> For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. <sup>30</sup> That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. <sup>31</sup> But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. <sup>32</sup> But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. 1 Cor. 11:27-32

## Spiritual factors

### Our spiritual **enemy**

<sup>8</sup> Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 1 Peter 5:8

<sup>11</sup> Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Ephesians 6:11, 12

<sup>10</sup> Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, <sup>11</sup> so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs. 2 Cor. 2:10, 11

<sup>3</sup> But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. 2 Cor. 3:3

### Our spiritual **exposure** (vulnerability)

<sup>13</sup> Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. <sup>14</sup> But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. <sup>15</sup> Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. James 1:13-15

<sup>12</sup> Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. <sup>13</sup> No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. 1 Corinthians 10:12, 13

### Our spiritual **entropy** (humanly inherent movement toward spiritual decline)

Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. Hebrews 2:1

<sup>12</sup> Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. <sup>13</sup> But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. <sup>14</sup> For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. Hebrews 3:12-14

<sup>11</sup> About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. <sup>12</sup> For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, <sup>13</sup> for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. <sup>14</sup> But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. Hebrews 5:11-14