

FOCUS ON FAITH

Stephen G. Derges, Pastor of Bridgnorth Baptist Church



INSIDE OUT

I've been doing a considerable amount of thinking recently about the 'belief systems' we have and where our values, attitudes and motives come from. We are influenced in many ways – parents and family members as well as others that we respect (or don't respect as the case may be) together with other external stimuli such as good and bad experiences – they all help to define us.

Our personalities also have a major role to play in the way we internally process those experiences. The same event may happen in the lives of two people with different personalities and backgrounds and have totally different effects on them. Some peoples' glass is always half empty, whilst other peoples' are half full.

And that's not all – our minds can also play tricks on us. If we've been badly let down by someone in the past, we may find it difficult to trust people. If something beneficial has happened when we've done something previously we often try to replicate the same circumstances. For example many sportsmen and women have a particular routine that they go through time and time again, such as the number of times a tennis player bounces the ball before he serves or the way a golfer takes his practice swings before he hits a drive. Many of us have little quirks and habits that dictate the way we do things.

...true faith and spirituality occur from the inside out

This last week I've been on a conference with other church leaders at which we were considering the differentiation between religion and spirituality.

There is of course a massive difference between the two – one dictionary definition of 'religious' is to be "extremely scrupulous or conscientious" so we can be 'religious' about anything we do from washing the car every weekend to always having a cup of tea or coffee first thing in the morning.

But we are spiritual beings too. Whereas we often talk about the body, soul and spirit, the Bible puts the order the other way around and refers to "**spirit, soul and body**" (see 1Thessalonians 5: 23).

I don't think this is just semantics, I believe the order of the words here is crucial to understand the link between religious faith, our belief systems and values.

The spirit is that part of our make-up that enables us to comprehend the nature of God. Jesus said that we should love God first and foremost and because God is spirit our worship should be in "**spirit and in truth**".

The word 'truth' here can also be interpreted as 'reality' – and we need to recognise that our minds, wills and emotions (our souls) inevitably impact on our behaviours and actions.

Truthfully reviewing how we live life based purely on how we feel and how we've handled the joys and sorrows that life throws at us is one stage. Acknowledging what we really value and our inner core beliefs is a much deeper level. It's appropriate to reassess from time to time the basis of our actions and to question what we believe and why.

As Jesus intimates in Mark's Gospel chapter 7 when talking about motives and actions, true faith and spirituality occur from the inside out. **When we align our inner selves appropriately with God's values and standards then external forces may affect us but not necessarily pull us down or defeat us.** That's why some people who go through major traumas can still retain their faith in God and in people – they live from within.

For many of us the big questions surround our destiny and our purpose, what life is really about, why we are here and what happens after we die. The Bible clearly talks about these as well as other burning issues:

- **We aren't accidents or after-thoughts:** we can read in various places in the Bible such as Acts 17: 26 & Psalm 139 that God created us – He even knew when and where we would be born and how our lives would pan out
- **There is a purpose and plan:** life as we know it now is not all there is – there is an eternal perspective too. The Bible says, "**It is in Christ that we find out who we are and what we're living for**"

Of course we're not robots and in many situations we get to choose what happens to us (and certainly how we react or respond to those events) but **the key to a fulfilled life is lining ourselves up with God's plans and living life from the inside out.**

If you'd like to find out more information on local Churches together with contact details, plus information on activities and other Christian resources, please log on to www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk.