

Rate each of the following 12 areas by marking the appropriate letter next to each heading

A = I consistently demonstrate solid growth in this area.

B = Progress is being made, but I need to focus on this area more to make it a solid and regular reality in my life.

C = To be honest, I am guilty of neglecting this area, therefore, I am making little or no significant progress right now in this area.

CONDUCTING A SPIRITUAL AUDIT

Twelve Questions To Keep Your Personal Accounts In Order

by FRED SMITH

When I was teaching an adult Sunday school class, one member, the CEO of a major firm, asked me to lunch. He started the conversation by saying, "I have a CPA to keep me liquid, a lawyer to keep *me* legal, and a doctor to keep me healthy. But I have no one to help assess my spiritual condition. Can you give me a 'spiritual audit'?"

I had never thought about such a thing. I thrashed around, trying to be helpful, but felt completely lost in doing what he wanted.

This led me to think about a "spiritual audit," first for myself and then possibly for others. In the two or three years since, I have accumulated twelve questions I ask myself. I hope you will be encouraged to develop your own audit if you feel it helpful.

1. Am I Content With Who I Am Becoming?

Every day I get one day closer to who I will

ultimately be. Am I satisfied with who this will be?

Our son, Fred, Jr., helped me with this question. He asked me about the important people in my life and after hearing each story, unerringly asked, "Did he finish well?" Some did, some didn't, and a few were disasters.

We must be sure our profession does not consume our person. It's important that we *be* more than we *do* or *have*. Too often I have seen executives leave their title and power and have nothing to fill the vacuum. They are shells, like the large beetles you find on pine trees in east Texas that look completely alive but have all their insides gone. They are as hollow as a drum.

Also, as we grow older, we must move from power to wisdom. Those who try to hold power too long are resented. Even parents who try to hold power over their children lose the love of their children. However, when we are able to give up power at the right time and become a wisdom figure, then we are useful, honored, and kept in the mainstream.

Of course, in power, we hold the offensive, while in wisdom we are the consultant—those who want our help come to us; we don't go to them. So I ask myself: Am I moving from power and becoming a person of wisdom?

2. Am I Becoming Less Religious and More Spiritual?

The Pharisees were religious; Christ is spiritual. Much tradition is religious, while relation in Christ is spiritual.

The difference between religion and spirituality is basically a matter of control. I define religion as an experience I can control while spirituality is an experience that controls me. I confess that after many years of involvement in organized religion, I often feel the shallowness of the experience, the restriction of the rules, and reach out with a hungry soul for something truly spiritual in a relation with Christ.

Recently a friend near the end of his life came from another country just to visit. He had been well-recognized in business and religious circles. He'd had audiences with the Pope and enjoyed many

honors in evangelical society. Yet he was spiritually hungry. As he drew near the end of his life, he wanted the warmth of spirituality rather than the formalism of religion. He wanted to do something significant, impressive, with his large fortune before his death.

I kept wishing he could, like a child, feel the love of God in a warm, personal, way, which would relieve him of feeling responsible to impress God.

3. Does My Family Recognize the Authenticity of My Spirituality?

They see me whole, I would like to believe—and must believe—that if I am growing spiritually, my family will recognize it.

The late Ray Stedman, pastor of Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, California, called together the first advisers for the Council on Biblical Exposition. There were seventeen or so well-known ministers and me, there as Ray's friend. During lunch, Stephen Olford said, "My brothers, I am weary of celebrity religion. I have had my share of honors, but when I die, unless my family can say, 'There is something of God in the man,' then I will have failed."

There came that holy hush of self-examination for each of us.

4. Do I Have A Flow-Through Philosophy?

Scripture says, "He that believeth in me out of his innermost parts will flow rivers of living water." The freshness is in the flow. The mountain stream is fresh; the Everglades are stagnant.

Some of us want to be a lake, not a river. We want to accumulate before we let too much flow through. However, as a Christian, I am to let the blessings flow through me.

Certainly this involves more than money per se. When Christ praised the widow who gave a mite, was he not praising her sacrifice rather than her gift? Could it be that God appreciates only what we give as a sacrifice? Didn't David say, "I will not give God that which costs me nothing"?

If I have been blessed with leadership, that blessing should flow out. An entrepreneurial friend in Colorado has developed a program, "Counsel and Capital," to help ministries in trouble. He analyzes their problem and makes a list of things, in order, that they need to do. Normally the first ten of the twenty things do not cost money; they cost organizational readjustment. When they have done the things that cost no money, then he helps them get the capital for doing things beyond that. My friend has a flow-through philosophy with his gift of leadership.

At a weekend retreat outside Fresno, I spent three days with a couple hundred laymen. To my surprise, they had not invited another speaker, so I had to hold forth from Friday noon until Sunday noon. (I accused them of running a cheap program with only one speaker who came free.) Late Sunday afternoon, I was flying back to Dallas when I realized, I *am totally relaxed*. This didn't make sense. After that much effort, I should have been either high as a kite or lower than a snake's belt buckle.

It suddenly occurred to me: There had been a real presence of the Holy Spirit in the sessions. I had been the pipe, not the pump. The pipe never gets tired. God had been the pump. How tired I would have been had I tried to be both the pump and the pipe.

Oswald Chambers warns that when we dam the blessings in our life, we become stagnant, cynical, mean-spirited. We must break the dam and let blessings flow like a river for the freshness is in the flow. Do I really have a flow-through way of Christian-living?

5. Do I Have A Quiet Center To My Life?

My mentor, Francois Fenelon, who walked with God three hundred years ago, said, "Peace is what God wants for you no matter what is happening."

I press this point to myself for it is important in my life. Our mutual friend Oswald Chambers says, "In our Lord's life there was none of the press and rush of tremendous activity that we regard so highly, and the disciple is to be as his master."

There is an important difference between the

fast track and the frantic track. It is not God's will for me that I be frantic.

When I was heading the operations of a manufacturing corporation we had an excitable manager who, whenever he got confused, called a supervisors' meeting to display it. After one of these fruitless meetings, I gave him my favorite little verse: "When in trouble, when in doubt, run in circles, scream and shout."

This harriedness is epidemic in our society. Unless we are running on empty, we don't feel we are normal. The other day I heard a prominent minister say that this next week he had a breakfast meeting every morning. I wanted to say to him, "This is not the way to live. This is not the way to have a family. This, to me, is not the way to be a man of God.

Often I, too, need to hear the command, "Be still, and know that I am God."

The late Senate chaplain Dick Halverson was helpful to me by suggesting that Jesus didn't have a day planner, he simply "went about doing good." When he was on his way to raise a dead child, he stopped to help a woman with an issue of blood. He didn't prioritize raising the dead over helping the sick. He simply went about doing the good that came his way.

Jesus had that quiet center. Do I have it too? Peace is the evidence of God.

6. Have I Defined My Unique Ministry?

Do I know what I can do effectively? The need is always bigger than any person can satisfy and so my call is simply to handle the part of the need that is mine to do.

In business I subscribed to the wisdom, "Opportunity is never mandate." Just because I had the opportunity to do something didn't mean I had to do it.

Fortunately I was able to define my unique ministry early in life, so I have not gone through midlife change. When young, I sat on a tombstone and decided what I wanted on mine: HE STRETCHED OTHERS. I have never changed it.

Defining my unique ministry is important because so many requests are made that take time and energy. Unless you know the things you can do uniquely well, you end up doing many mediocre things just to please others. Definition and discipline are essential.

7. Is My Prayer Life Improving?

I have been reading and rereading Oswald Chambers's little book, "*Prayer, the Holy Occupation*". In this he defines the essence of prayer as "finding the mind of Christ."

Years ago, when Torrey Johnson was starting Youth for Christ, he invited me to his hotel room in Memphis for some conversation. At the close he said, "Let's pray." Then he prayed as I had never heard anyone pray before. I was accustomed to formal prayer, but Torrey started out, "Thank you. Lord. You know we're just a couple of young, men who have been chewing the rag together ..."

I opened one eye and looked around the room, for I was sure another presence was there. I didn't see anyone, but that prayer made an impression on me. Occasionally now I hear someone pray the prayer of reality. A few of these prayers have been so earthy that I can't repeat them in print, yet I am sure they reached the throne.

I do not know when I am fully a man of prayer but I can perceive progress if I am making it. Progress, not perfection, is all I can hope for in my spiritual growth,

One test of my prayer life is this: Do my decisions have prayer as an integral part, or do I make decisions out of my desires and then immerse them in a sanctimonious sauce I call prayer?

8. Have I Maintained A Genuine Awe Of God?

I've never felt I could express my awe of the Almighty on an automobile bumper. Awe inspires, it overwhelms, it intimidates my humanness, it inspires worship. Awe isn't learned; it is realized.

A friend recently went out into the night on his ranch and looking up at the stars with awe, repeated with Ziggy, "Go, God, go!" I have felt this

same response on clear nights in the Colorado mountains or the piney woods of east Texas. It's generally come when I am alone with nature or when I have seen his salvation work in a changed life.

Once, after speaking in Anaheim, I was walking down the exit corridor of the convention center when I met Dr. Gerhard Dirks, the great German computer scientist. It had been years since we'd seen each other so we hugged, and I asked him, "Gerhard, what are you excited about?"

With moist eyes he said, "The awe of God." He said, "Fred, can you imagine a mind so great as to conceive the DNA?"

I can't. The awe of God—is it growing within me?

9. Is My Humility Genuine?

To me nothing is so arrogant as false humility. Once I was asked to speak to a group and before I spoke, a talented, young lady sang. I turned to her and quietly said, "You have a lovely voice."

It shocked her. She wrapped her arms around her torso and bent all the way forward, saying in a hysterical voice, "Don't praise me. Give God the glory!"

I wanted to shake her out of this false humility so I said, "He didn't do the singing you did." Then I said, "I didn't say it was divine. I said it was lovely."

How I would like to have spent some time talking to her about accepting, her gift, her strength with gratitude. Wouldn't it have been so releasing for her if she could have said, "Thank you very much. I thoroughly enjoy my gift. I appreciate the opportunity, of singing for God's glory." Then she would not have been denying her gift nor the compliment I gave her (remembering that Fenelon said, "Accept the compliment from a worthy person as a comfort of God")

There are two definitions of humility I like. The first was given to me by our son:

"Humility is accepting your strength with gratitude." The other I have used since my teen years: "Humility is not denying the power that you have but admitting that the power comes through you not from you."

We are not to pray to be given humility; that prayer would have to be answered with tribulation. We are told to humble ourselves. Am I doing it?

10. Is My "Spiritual Feeding" the Right Diet for Me?

I've stopped calling my spiritual reading time "a devotion" but rather "a feeding time" for it as when my soul gets fed. It took me many years to finally come to what I believe to be a healthy menu uniquely fitted to my needs.

We can't all wear the same glasses nor can we take the same medicine. Just so, we have different personality and character traits that need developing or dwarfing. That means we must find the spiritual feeding that is right for us.

Currently I'm reading from seven or so different sources. To me, it's like eating seven-grain bread. Each source is contributing something I need, either in prevention, maintenance, or development. This includes the Bible, various writings of the saints, and short sermons by great preachers of the past. I find I feed best on those things that have lasted and that have produced the people I admire most.

11. Is Obedience in Small Matters Built Into My Reflexes?

Do I try to bargain with God or rationalize with him? Obedience largely determines my relation with Christ following new birth. He says I am his friend if I obey him. Therefore I must check my obedience. My good intentions count for little.

I can obey God out of fear or from love. Both He and I prefer love.

Also, how do I handle disobediences? Do I give excuses or confessions? Do I foolishly either carry guilt or try to punish myself for what God alone can forgive—and will?

12. Do I Have Joy?

Joy is promised to me. Do I have it? If the relationship with Christ is right, I do.

To me, joy is perfected in the full belief in the total sovereignty of God. Doubt dilutes joy.

For five years I left my normal fellowship and attended a church that gave me one great blessing—a firm belief in the sovereignty of God. I now totally believe that God doesn't need me, He loves me; and I don't work for Him to earn His love, I work for him as a result of his love. He lets me work in order to mature me. That brings joy.

Does my joy extend into my suffering? My suffering is my maturation. Even my dry periods produce perseverance, which is pleasing to God. Therefore, I can be joyful in the adequacy of God.

My Motive

The most important element in my spiritual audit is my motive for wanting one. Am I working for progress or for pride? Too often, some of each. My life is a mixed bag.

I cannot put a number on my audit. When I worked in a manufacturing plant, I actually tried to put a weekly figure on employees' morale, but this was a guess. Now I want only to know that I'm progressing. Coming to maturity is such a slow progress.

An audit is more than a statement of condition. It is also an indication of my spiritual potential.



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was a business executive
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