

# A Spiritual Check-Up

September is here, summer holidays are over for most of us and in most churches the pace accelerates. Organisations that haven't met over the summer begin their autumn programmes and church life becomes generally busier. It is the beginning of a new church year.

Over sixty years ago Dr W E Sangster produced a small booklet, "A Spiritual Check-up", priced sixpence! It was re-printed twenty times. He suggests that it is good for Christians to have an occasional examination of their lives. Many of the saints advocate this too, not just occasionally, but every night before going to sleep. This does not mean becoming hopelessly introverted but rather being honest about all that has happened that day. We can have very short memories regarding our own faults and are brilliant at excusing ourselves. Perhaps we are thinking, So and So should be reading this, they have been a shocker today. It is not about anyone else, it is about me.

It may be that it would be good for us to have a spiritual check-up before we become engrossed with church work and, if we dare mention it already, prior to preparations for Christmas! The patients who are most in danger are those who don't acknowledge that they are sick and therefore, don't seek the help of a doctor. It is exactly the same in our spiritual life: if we don't admit that we are sick we will not seek the aid of the good Physician. We will slide into constant ill-health spiritually or, even worse, death. We are often quite good at taking the spiritual temperature of the church, and even better at judging the spiritual temperature of the world! This isn't about that, it is about each one of us individually.

Dr Sangster asks some pertinent questions. Many are as relevant today, as when they were first written. His first list of questions comes under the heading, "In the World". They include, "Do I speak the truth", and "Am I a person of the strictest honesty?" "Do I swear?" or "tell suggestive stories?" We could add today, what about the internet? There are many temptations. We read that in most congregations there will be, at least, two men who have become addicted to online pornography. These hidden sins, or spiritual illnesses, are the ones that do the most damage.

It is more difficult in the workplace to be a Christian than when Sangster was alive. There is less goodwill towards Christians and more intolerance. It can often be one of the most difficult places to be a witness to Christ. Those in the forefront of the battle are often Christians working in secular employment. The temptations can come thick and fast, especially the temptation to be one person at work, and another at church. St Francis de Sales pointed out that we are called to flourish wherever God has planted us. That, for some of us, means where we work. We are not alone, the Lord is with us, and wherever we are, we are part of the invisible body of Christ.

We tend to put our best selves forward in church. Again, there are some searching questions, "Do I love the people I am called to work with: clear up misunderstandings with them quickly and never criticize them to others?" "Do I want God's cause to advance, or is it my chief desire that I should advance it?" "Do I tend to dominate? – or leave the real work to others?" This

section is followed by a prayer, “I need to be forgiven not only for my sins but for my soiled virtues”.

Under the heading, “In the Home”, one of the questions that Sangster poses is, “In the morning half-awake, and in the evening over-tired, am I still a Christian, courteous, grateful and good-humoured?” Difficult, thought the writer of this article, remembering numerous times when the good humour has definitely been missing. That leads us to the whole question of grace. When we allow the Lord to shine his light into our hearts it can be truly shocking – a little like receiving a bad diagnosis from a doctor. We are helpless in the face of our own wrong attitudes. Jesus has the answer. He can heal. We have placed much emphasis on physical healing in the church, we pray fervently for it, but what about spiritual healing? If we will humble ourselves and are honest we can run to the Lord Jesus, our good and kind Physician. Then, like the prodigals that we are, he will make us whole.



Flourish  
where you  
are planted