



PASSIONATE LIVING 7

“Practicing the Principles of a Vital Life”

This morning my message will take us back to 7th Grade Science class. It'll be a longer journey for some, and for some like me, who missed that day, a new and exciting trip. In most 7th grade science classes, kids learn about a seven-fold series of questions or tests to help determine if an organism is alive. These principles apply to almost every living being, plant and animal, and as we'll discover today...can also be applied in a spiritual sense to our Christian or Spiritual life. Wouldn't you like to know if you are spiritually alive? Sitting in a pew each week doesn't make you 'alive' any more than sitting in McDonalds every week will make you a French fry!

So what is this test, and how shall we remember it? Have you ever heard of Mrs. Gren? That's the acronym for the seven principles that determine life. We'll look at each test to see if we are living a Vital, Alive, Passionate, Life. We may come to see that we are not alive at all, and I'll have a prescription for that eventuality at the end.

Our shape today is a Heptagon, a seven-sided orb, with each side reminding us of one letter from Mrs. Gren, and one principle of Vital, Passionate Living. I think I'm alive, but I want to know for sure. We might think our church is alive, but maybe applying this test will reveal otherwise. Are you ready? OK

1. MOVEMENT

The first test of something being alive is; is there movement following stimulation? In physical terms if you poke some part of the body with a needle, some movement ought to occur, indicating life, at some level.

At a much deeper spiritual level, movement in response to stimuli might be harder to detect. John Wesley was fond of saying that if we are standing still, we're moving backwards.

I think of the Israelites standing next to the Red Sea. They have followed God and Moses out of their bondage in Egypt to the shores of this beautiful seaside getaway. They are probably tired, and may have been ready to camp out. Doing so would have been the death of them. They needed to move and the sound of approaching hoof beats and chariots provided the stimuli prompting them to abandon any thoughts of building cottages. The Egyptian army forced them to move, and God parted the waters to make it possible.

We encounter all kinds of stimuli in life that can produce movement, or resistance. When God is moving in our lives, how do we respond? Do we lay down until the feeling passes, or sneak out of church until the conviction subsides, or do we carefully open ourselves to God's stimuli and begin to move toward a deeper walk with God?

As God leads our church, are we moving forward, or standing still (moving backwards)? It's a good question. So many churches choose death rather than allow God's stimuli to move them off dead center, its fateful. Don't allow God's movement in your life to go unaccounted. Embrace the stimuli, and move toward God. Movement, it's the first sign of life.

2. RESPIRATION

Respiration is not just breathing, but the production and release of energy produced by the breathing process. One of the first things EMT's do is check to see if the patient is breathing.

In the Old and New Testaments God breathed into His people and released the energy of his Spirit in our lives. Both the Hebrew and Greek words for Breath, are sometimes translated Spirit. In Genesis 2 God breathed his Breath, or Spirit into Adam and it/he became a living creature, and not until. In John 20 Jesus breathed on his disciples and the Holy Spirit came into them.

Both John Wesley and Martin Luther described their basic relationship with God as natural as 'breathing'. We need to breathe in God. Walking with God should be as automatic as the respiratory process, if it's not that automatic, there is something wrong. If you are thinking about your breathing at this second, there is probably something wrong with you. Breathing is natural, and one of the body's greatest needs. Have you ever seen someone gasping for breath after being underwater for too long?

Reminds me of a story. A young man approaches a wise elder seeking advice for how to become a better Christian. The old man leads him to a tank of water, grabs him behind the head and holds him underwater way longer than normal. As the young man begins fighting, and gasps for breath the old man finally lets him up and remarks; "When you want God as badly as you wanted that next breath, your Christian Life will grow and mature."

Breathing naturally is a sign of life, physical and spiritual. Now:

3. SENSITIVITY

Sensitivity on a physical level is akin to movement. Checking for signs of life often involves checking one or more of the 5 senses: sight, hearing, tasting, touching, and smelling.

Sensitivity is important in the kingdom. The human body has multiple senses, and so does the body of Christ. The more senses that are active, the more we will see the needs around us and be moved to respond.

Throughout the NT we see the sensitivity of Jesus. He responded to people in need wherever he went, even when he didn't 'feel' like it. He saw the crowd looking for something to eat and he felt sorry for them. *"Then Jesus called his disciples and told them, 'I feel sorry for these people.'" Mt 15*

One sign of life among us who claim to be God's people is; are we sensitive to people in need around us? Are we careful to remember the least, the last and the lost? Do the things that break God's heart, break ours? Are widows, and prisoners, the hungry, the naked, and the underprivileged in our prayers, and the subjects of our giving as we write our checks each month, or make our pledges each year? Sensitivity is a sign of life. Are we sensitive to each other, or does our religion consist entirely of what I can get out of it, or what's in it for me? Are we sensitive or selfish might be a real test, and sign of life (or death) as we move on!

4. GROWTH

Growth comes through the natural rhythms of life. All living things are growing. When you stop growing, you die; it's that simple! Ever notice how people respond to kids they haven't seen for a long time? "My, you have grown so much"! Well, what did you expect? Growth is a natural sign of life!

Paul once contrasted the people who adhere to the values of the world, and the people (us) who adhere to the values of Jesus; listen"

"Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the Church. He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love." Eph. 4: 15-16

For years The Church Growth Movement attempted to enable churches to find the secrets to growth and translate them for various church settings. Along came Rick Warren who espouses that Healthy Churches Grow...quite naturally! If our church is not healthy, it will not grow, and the reverse is also true.

I know physically we stop growing when we reach about 20, but in spiritual terms we are never to stop growing. There is always more to learn, and if you think you know it all, then get to teaching! Growth is a sign of life.

5. REPRODUCTION

The concept of reproduction as a sign or signal of life has a two-fold meaning. The ability to reproduce as a sign of life is not just a veiled reference to our human ability to create new little human beings. No, it is more a reference to our body's natural ability to produce new living cells on an ongoing basis. Except for your brain cells, 50,000,000 of the cells in your body will have died and been replaced with others, all while I have been reading this sentence.

That being said reproduction is different from growth in that it is a multiplication of the whole organism, not simply growing new cells. Let me try to illustrate using an apple tree. Apple trees produce what? Apples, but what resides at the heart of each apple produced? Seeds, and what purpose do the seeds play? Yes, to become more apple trees.

I fear far too many churches and even more individual Christians are failing this test of life. We have grown overly fond of growing fruit in our lives, seeing the fruit and gifts of the spirit being perfected in our lives and churches, and we have failed to see the second side of reproduction. Jesus didn't just teach his disciples to be mature, well equipped fishermen, no, he taught them to catch fish! We don't exist as Christians just to become more holy, but also to make more disciples. Apple trees make apples, but they also make little apple trees.

If we have not been planting or investing ourselves in the life of another, for the sheer purpose of seeing Christ grow and develop in that person's life, then we are probably not fully alive!

You think you are too old for this to apply to you? Listen to one of my new favorite scriptures:

"Now that I am old and gray, do not abandon me, O God. Let me proclaim your power to this new generation, your mighty miracles to all who come after me." Ps. 71:

18

6. EXCRETION

Okay, you say...I can see how the other six biological processes can be applied to my life in God, but not excretion. That's just gross! Wrong. Our bodies are not the only things that build up a collection of junk throughout the day. Our hearts do too. We build up a sediment of sin and we need to get rid of it. We empty our hearts of this unhealthy stuff through the process of repentance. If we do not get rid of these sins, they will act just like toxins do in the human body, causing illness and eventually, death.

We don't like to admit we have all that crud piling up inside us, but we do. In our self-righteousness, we're quick to see the offenses of others toward us rather than our own sin. We compare our best moments to the worst habits of other people, and we come out looking pretty good. Like the Pharisee, we thank God that we are not like the tax collector. But sin is sin, and it's all toxic. It's got to go...(Pardon the pun) Jesus wants us to get rid of the bitter toxins, especially unforgiveness. It's so important Jesus included it in his model prayer "forgive us as we forgive others."

The Apostle Paul understood this cleansing, 'bathroom' ritual:

"So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don't be greedy...You used to do these things when your life was still part of this world. But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language." Colossians 3: 5-8

Some folks want to begin a relationship with Jesus by adding certain things to their lives, without subtracting some others, and that's just not healthy. We can add all the Bible studies, and prayer meetings, and devotional times, and Christian fellowship we want. But if we don't spend sometime, probably each day 'detoxifying' our souls, we're not going to make much progress.

What toxins need to go from our lives?

7. NUTRITION

All living things must take in nutrients or they will die. I've known for years my eating habits were causing me problems, and I'm working on rectifying that physical situation. Interestingly enough, the process has helped my spiritual situation as well. Less focus on eating (poorly) and more focus on eating to live rather than living to eat, is producing a more favorable Spiritual environment for my soul as well.

Jesus understood this principle when he declared to his disciples; *"I am the bread of Life."* He also gives us a great reminder when he said: *"My food is to do the will of him who sent me."* Feasting on the very word of God and obeying God's commands and will; will help us grow, and prove we are indeed alive.

We have to be careful not to allow our crazy 21st century eating habits to infect our Spiritual eating habits. Are we eating regular, healthy meals for proper spiritual nutrition or are we just trying to grab something as we 'drive through' life on the run. A church service now and then. Maybe a little devotional booklet when you think of it – which is not all that often, if we're honest. A quick prayer over lunch if other Christians are watching, but not if unbelievers are watching. That's not going to cut it, and will leave us 'starving'; anorexic, in a spiritual sense. You are what you eat, in a spiritual sense, not just a physical one! (remember what holiday is coming up)

In conclusion, I promised at the beginning a prescription if we discover we are failing the Passionate Living test. If you are here today and have been 'sensitive' to the 'movement' of God, and now realize you are dead in your sins, resentment, unforgiveness, or just plain didn't know you could be alive; here is what you do.

- 1) Acknowledge you are a sinner and admit your need for God to be your savior.
- 2) Invite Jesus Christ to forgive you, and to come live inside you as you begin to live in a new relationship with Him as your boss.
- 3) Continue the process of growing and maturing as you observe these 7 signs of life. Let us pray.

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M R S. G R E N

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