

Living in truth series.

The Spiritual Life by Fr John Edwards SJ

What is it?

Probably the best definition is HOW I MAKE EFFECTIVE IN MY LIFE THE GIFT TO ME OF CHRIST'S REDEMPTION. Study of the Spiritual Life can teach us how to respond to God. There are many loose ideas about "spirituality" so it is good to ask:

What ISN'T it?

It isn't to do with refined taste - you are not more spiritual if you prefer Beethoven to Hip Hop.

It isn't to do with the feelings - cheering your football team's victory adds no more to the spiritual life than commiserating their losing a game.

It isn't a question of intelligence - a professor of poetry may be no more developed spiritually than a six year old child in primary school.

It is not to do with the ability to "contemplate", to do Zen meditation or yoga. It is not to do with controlling one's mind, producing alpha rhythms in one's brain or lowering one's blood pressure by mental processes or breath control.

So what is "Spirit" and "Spiritual"?

A human being is a union of matter and spirit. Spirit is distinguished from matter. Matter is measurable, it consists of atoms, molecules and energy. It comprises all inanimate creation and the animal kingdom below Man, in which all that happens does so according to the laws of nature. (A puppy's affection is an "automatic" response.) But there is nothing automatic about Spirit. It is the element in us which can choose and which can love (as opposed to simply feel affection). It is the element which is decisive in our relationship with God, so it lasts forever.

What is my relationship with the Holy Spirit? And with other spirits?

It is on our spirit that God works and through our spirit that we relate personally to God. We can speak of practical discernment, in which we use our reason, our consciences, the deep intuitions of our hearts, and the guidance of others in order to know what is true and how to live our lives in the truth. In so doing, we realise our human and Christian vocation. In this way, we endeavour to be true to God's plan for our lives.

A warning. There are good spirits which are angels; there are bad spirits which are fallen angels. It is possible to be "spiritual" and catastrophically on the wrong track. Much of what is called New Age, everything to do with the occult, anything like Ouija boards, spiritualism, even fortune-telling, should be avoided as one would avoid filth or poison.

Life develops - in what way does the spiritual life develop?

Our definition at the top speaks of making effective Christ's redemption, and this is plainly a process. Traditionally, Christians have described this process speaking of the "Purgative" way: a stage in growth where one tries to serve God, but largely through fear, and where God works to purify from sin and repair the damage. Next, there is the "Illuminative" way, where Jesus Christ has begun to be the focus of one's life, and life is mostly in the light of what Jesus teaches. Then there is the "Unitive" way, where God is easily able to work on and through one's spirit, and where love of God is the dominant motive. It is never useful to try and find out where one is.

Does this description enable one to guide oneself along in the spiritual life?

Absolutely not. If you need a guide (not everyone does), find someone wise and holy. Be careful; if the person is unfaithful to the Church's teaching, or seems keen to 'direct' you, go elsewhere.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, may the mystery of who You are so captivate my heart and mind that the mystery of who I am, and who You call me to be, will form, reform, and define my character. Help me to have a greater realisation of myself as a new creation in You. - to experience what it means, in my daily life, to be seated with You in the heavenly realms as I experience life on earth, to go against the flow of the negative and destructive energy of the culture with the positive and constructive light of Your kingdom. As I try to live my life in the heart of the Church and in the heart of the world, make me know by experience, now, what it means to be raised up with You. Help me set my heart on things above, where You are seated at the right hand of God the Father, so that the quality of my living and the character of who I am will give glory to You and be beneficial to others. Thank You, Jesus ... Alleluia

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U got to believe by Fr Stan Fortuna CFR
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