

## Spiritual or Emotional Health - Is There a Difference?

Jane is married, a mother of three teenagers and active in her church. The last couple of years have drained her energy and she feels stressed, agitated and depressed much of the time. Her life seems out of control and she wonders what happened to the joy she once took for granted.

Friends have told Jane that if only she would invest herself more fully in service and scripture study, her emotional problems would disappear. For a time, she took their advice and poured herself into service, scripture study and prayer. But Jane still feels overwhelmed by her life. In fact, because she has worked so hard on her spiritual life without the expected emotional results, she feels abandoned by God.

"If God is this hard to please," she thinks, "why continue to try?" Not surprisingly, Jane has begun to drift away from her church and those who seem to have such "easy answers." She feels like she must be the only one for whom these answers don't seem to apply.

What is wrong here?

Think of the categorical characteristics that make you a human being. You might think of the physical aspects or the mental aspects. But you are a social, spiritual and emotional being as well. Your welfare (and joy) depends largely upon how well you strengthen each of these categories. When you struggle in one area of your welfare, it is likely to affect how you experience other areas. For example, if you are not physically well you may struggle to have the mental energy to focus or be productive, thus affecting your relationships and social life.

But while it is true that every part of your being affects all other parts, it is also true that each part is distinct. There is a limit to the amount of benefit that will "spill over" to affect other parts. In other words, you cannot expect an improvement in one area to completely satisfy the requirements for an improvement in another area. For instance, you might attend church to increase your spirituality but it will not satisfy a physical need for good diet and exercise; nor will it eliminate the need for an education in the sciences, literature or the arts. Likewise, gaining a doctorate degree in a certain discipline does not fulfill a need for spirituality. Becoming physically fit does not fulfill a need to be well-read.

Why is this important?

There is a tendency for spiritually-oriented people to lump spiritual and emotional into one. We speak of our "spiritual /emotional" selves as if they are one and the same. We do this largely because of a limitation in our training. We have not been taught ways to isolate and directly strengthen our emotional "muscles." Because of our ignorance, we can only advise those who are struggling emotionally to increase their social outlets or to become more physically fit. Or, as in Jane's case, we advise them to pursue greater spirituality. We simply lack the understanding and vocabulary to suggest methods to directly increase emotional self-reliance. By default, we are left with only those methods

that bring "spill over" benefits.

Make no mistake - these "spill over" benefits are very important. We should pursue them because they add so much to our welfare. In Jane's case, for instance, there are great emotional benefits that can come from serving others and gaining a close relationship with our Creator. But these affects are meant to be in addition to the affects from methods employed to directly strengthen emotional health. In Jane's case, there were no such methods employed.

Just because society has failed to teach us of these methods of emotional strengthening doesn't mean they don't exist. Creative Journal Expressive Arts (CJEA) techniques, for instance, teach methods involving music, artistic expression, movement and a unique way of journaling. CJEA techniques represent some ways in which we can focus specifically on our emotional welfare. CJEA and other methods raise awareness of our internal emotional "world," and might even be considered a form of self therapy. By learning how to emotionally nurture and protect ourselves, for instance, we gain more control - thus increasing our "emotional self reliance."

How do these methods work?

Our next article will address the nine families of emotions and how to become more emotionally "literate," the foundation of emotional health.

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