

Spiritual Orphans or Sons & Daughters?

Spiritual diagnostics: am I growing - or not growing in my faith?

When we fall ill, our GP runs a series of diagnostic tests to determine the cause. This chart is a diagnostic tool to help us see where our faith may be out of sorts. Jesus said, "I will not leave you as orphans" then promised to send the Holy Spirit (Jn.14:18). On the left are twenty symptoms of an "orphan spirit." Opposite them are the corresponding fruits that will appear as we learn to rest in the loving care of our Heavenly Father, and as we learn to trust in Jesus as our "whole and sole" righteousness (Luther).

SPIRITUAL ORPHANS ▼



▼ SONS & DAUGHTERS

"Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?" – Gal.3:3

"I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you." – Jn.14:18
 "So, we know and rely on the love God has for us." – 1 Jn.4:16

- I feel** distant from God, anxious, and joyless. I'm a vacuum of self concern.
- I give in** to my pet sins and am growing less sensitive to them. I don't feel needy. (1 Jn.1:6-10 - "If we say we have no sin...")
- I live** on a success/fail basis. I need be right and look good. (performance oriented)
- I feel** guilty, insecure, and unworthy. I worry about how people view me and whether I fit in.
- I doubt** that "all things work together for good", or that God has my best interests at heart.
- I say** "yes" to everything and fear saying "no". I try to please everybody, but then burn out.
- I tend to use** rather than love people. I'm self-centred. I want to be helped, not be helpful.
- I get** angry and defensive at the suggestion that I might be self-righteous. I am resistant to praying "Search me O God..." (Psalm 139:23,24)
- I must** be right about everything. I can't tolerate criticism. I crave the approval and praise of others. (Matt.23:5; Jn.5:44; 12:43)
- I feel I must** point out my accomplishments or they might go unnoticed. (Gal.6:14)
- I think** "I'll show them!" "Just watch me!" "Where those people failed, I will succeed." (will-power)
- I use** my tongue like a sword to cut others up. (Jas.3:5-8)
- I constantly compare** myself with others which leads me to either pride or depression—depending on how good I appear in comparison.
- I'm a charter member** of the R.O.C.L. (Royal Order of the Curled Lip). I'm an expert at pointing out anything and everything wrong. Favorite meal: *Carp & Chips*.

- 1** **I have** a growing intimacy with God. His love frees me from self-centredness. (1Jn.4:16; Mt.5:25ff)
- 2** **I still mess up**, but I'm repenting more quickly. I have a growing consciousness of and sensitivity to my sins. (1 Tim.1:15; Rom.8:1-9)
- 3** **I want** to make *God* look good. *It's not about me*. Only God is always right.
- 4** **I feel** loved, forgiven, and secure because I am *consciously* clothed in Jesus' righteousness.
- 5** **I have** a growing childlike trust that God's sovereign plan for my life is wise and good.
- 6** **I say**, "Can you wait a bit, please? I want to ask my Senior Partner first." (Jn.14:13; 15:16)
- 7** **I am** growing more self-forgetful and often think, "What can I do to help and bless them?" (Phil.2:4)
- 8** **I know** I'm self-righteous. I want God to show me my sin so that I can repent, be cleansed, and so bring more glory to Him. (Ps. 139:23,24)
- 9** **I can** admit to wrong and can accept criticism because Jesus is my righteousness. I need no "record" to boast in. (1 Cor.10:31; Phil.3:7-9)
- 10** **I point** others to Jesus, and am learning to boast in my *weaknesses*. (2 Cor.12:9,10)
- 11** **"I can do all things** through Christ who gives me strength!" (Phil. 4:13 is not just a memory verse.)
- 12** **The Spirit** is helping me use my tongue to praise, thank, edify, and build others up. (Eph.4:29,30)
- 13** **I am growing** more secure in God's love for me in the Gospel, so I don't need to get my sense of worth from others. (Phil.3:9; 1 Cor.4:3,4)
- 14** **I am not** blind to the wrong all around me, but as I grow to love the good, like Paul, *I choose to focus* on what is "good and lovely." (Phil.4:8)



SPIRITUAL ORPHANS... ▼

I gossip quite a bit (confess other people's sins). Perhaps I have the gift of discernment? As a bonus, when I criticise others, it diverts attention away from my faults. (Prov.17:9)

Prayer? Actually, I'm quite prayerless. When all else fails, I pray. To be truthful, I pray more in public than I do in private.

I'm rather self-centred and controlling. "*They must see things my way!*" I have a deep need to be in control of people and situations.

Position, possessions, and busyness make me feel worthy and significant. Knowing Jesus doesn't satisfy me. (Compare Phil.3:8)

I'm not good enough. If I could just do more, I might feel worthy, accepted, and *righteous*.

I find it difficult to share my faith. After all, one's faith is an intensely personal matter. When I do say anything for Christ, it's more to defend my position than to express my loving concern for lost people. (Rom.15:13)

▼ SONS & DAUGHTERS...

15

Nowadays I am able to be honest about my faults and can confess them to others. I'm becoming more teachable and correctable. Good heavens! I'm often wrong! (Jas.5:16)

16

I don't limit conversations with my Father to morning devotions. He wants me to partner with Him throughout the day. (1Thess5:16-18)

17

I'm becoming more Christ-controlled and so am learning to pray and trust the Holy Spirit to change people and situations. (Gal.5:24)

18

"And having Him, I desire nothing else on earth." (Ps.73:25) "*May I never boast except in the cross of Christ Jesus my Lord...*" (Gal.6:14)

19

I'm believing the Gospel more! Jesus is my worthiness, my *whole* and *sole* righteousness.

20

I long for others to know God the way I know him. "*May God...fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*" (Rom.15:13, and see 2Cor.5:11,14)

Are you frustrated that your spiritual growth is so sporadic? Welcome to the club. Our progress from the left to the right side of the page will vary from rapid to snail-like. Worse, at times we will suffer painful retreats back to the left—what one of my clever students called "the orphanic shift". But take heart. Jesus died for messes like you and me, and when we struggle, we're in the best of company—with St. Paul himself (see Rom.7:15-24 "*The good that I want to do, I don't do...*" †). The Bible variously describes the Christian life as a race to be run (1Cor.9:24; Heb.12:1-3), a wrestling match (Eph.6:12), and a fight (1Tim.6:12, etc.). So, Peter says, "*Don't be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering as though something strange were happening to you!*" (1Pet.4:12). Apparently some of us have been told that the Christian life is a victorious romp in the park. Phil Yancey's "Unhappy Secrets of the Christian Life" unmasks this dream. Should you meet someone who claims to have found "the secret of holiness," beware. Ask if you can stay in their guest room for two weeks. Then, watch and listen. Chances are you will see more sin than you bargained for—a lot more. Isn't it reasonable to assume that if perfection were possible, Paul, the man who penned no less than thirteen of the New Testament's twenty-seven books, would have achieved it?

But if there really are no "Seven Easy Steps to Holiness" and no secret formulas, *how can we* begin to move away from that spirit of "orphanhood" toward thinking, feeling, and acting like who we really are—God's radically loved sons and daughters? Paul made clear that "human effort" cannot move you in that direction, but looking to Christ in faith and depending on the Holy Spirit will. Would you like proof of that? **Do a little exercise:** Try to determine *what one must believe* to produce the twenty lovely byproducts listed on the right side of these pages. "Believe," you say? Yes...

1. Believe that the Father has set his love on you, adopted you into His family, delights in you, and, for his honour and glory, is totally committed to your care and keeping—now and for all eternity. (Rom.8:1,14-39; Eph.1:3-21; 1Jn.3:1)

2. Believe that the Son died to pay for all your sins, that he was raised to life for you, and *this very moment* he is seated at the right hand of the Father "interceding" for you, i.e., presenting himself to the Father *as your righteousness*. The result is that in the Father's eyes, sinner that you are, you are *beautiful* because He sees you clothed in what Luther called the "gift-righteousness" of his Son (Rom.8:34; 1 Cor.5:21; Heb.7:24f; Gal.3:27). Hold on, this gets even better.

3. Believe that the Holy Spirit is in your heart this instant crying "*Abba, Father!*" so that as his adopted child *you* can echo back that same cry. (Gal.4:6; Rom.8:15). *Cry it!* Fix your eyes on Jesus and keep them there (Heb.12:2). It is our trust in *Jesus' gift-righteousness* that saves and sanctifies us. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit will come in fuller measure—like *rivers of living water*" as we "*keep coming*" and "*keep drinking*" of Him. (Jn.7:37ff).

Your brother in Christ, *Johnny Long*

BREAKOUT ACTIVITY

1. Private: Read the left-hand column and tick 3 items you sometimes struggle with.

2. Group: Gospel Application. If you are a courageous lot, share one item each and discuss how: a. trusting in the Father's love more fully, and/or b. trusting in Jesus' righteousness as your righteousness, will move you from left to right.

† Despite the fact that in Romans 7:14-27 Paul writes in the first person present tense, some Bible teachers deny that he refers to himself. Others like Luther, Calvin, Haldane, Hodge, Murray and F.F. Bruce insist that Paul's description "is truly autobiographical" (Bruce, Paul: *Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, p.197). Calvin says that Paul speaks for himself *and* for us all (Commenatry on Romans, Pringle, pp. 266ff). To think otherwise is to dangerously underestimate the power of our flesh. And yes, Satan is a most formidable foe as well. But, it is interesting that Paul gives him no mention in Romans 7 where, like Walt Kelley's famous little cartoon character Pogo (an opossum), he laments, "*We have met the enemy, and he is us.*"