

Evaluating Spirituality 10 March 1998

by George Verwer

George Verwer discusses the complexities of evaluating spirituality and emphasizes the need for grace and love in this process.

Duration: 44:41

Scripture: Philemon 1:1

Topics: "Spirituality"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on his experience at Bible College and in an OM (Operation Mobilization) environment. He discusses the challenges of spirituality and how it can become overwhelming to absorb so much information. The speaker mentions a current movement of 40 days of prayer and fasting in the United States, and questions the effectiveness of such practices for the average evangelical who may not have experience with fasting or attending prayer meetings. The speaker also emphasizes the importance of evaluating people's spirituality and not making quick judgments, using the example of the biblical book of Philemon.

Transcript

This is the ICT prayer meeting on Tuesday the 10th of March 1998. Thank you for your prayers. Comes right after Titus.

Tucked in there before Hebrews. Okay, let's read this. Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus.

And Timothy, our brother, to the NIV. To Philemon, our dear friend and fellow worker. To Aphia, our sister.

To Archippus, our fellow soldier. And to the church that meets in your home. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers. Little phrase, isn't it? But if we took that seriously it would revolutionize our lives. Because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.

Your love has given me great joy and encouragement because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints. Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. Amazing.

I then, as Paul, an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus, I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me. I am sending him, who is my very heart, back to you.

I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel, but I did not want to do anything without your consent so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced. Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good, no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, a dear brother. He is very dear to me, but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.

So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. That's strong, isn't it? If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand.

I will pay it back, not to mention that you owe me your very self. I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord, refresh my heart in Christ. Confident of your obedience, I write to you knowing that you will do even more than I ask.

And one thing more, prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers. Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. What a phenomenal epistle. We don't have time to give a great exposition and go into detail, but I would encourage you to study Philemon.

I've heard messages on this book and read. Of course, a lot that you read as life goes on, you're not able to remember. And so just reading this afresh in preparation for tonight was a great ministry to my own heart.

The thing that God put on my heart, especially for tonight, and I wish it was in a more work-through form, because I've been working on it for a long time and still don't really necessarily have God's mind on how to express it, is simply that I believe one of the great mistakes, we've made many mistakes, speaking of myself, speaking of the movement, people in the movement from the early days, but it's been impressed upon me, again, that one of the great mistakes is mistakes in evaluating people, in evaluating their spirituality. The great thrust of OM in the early days, and I hope true to today, was not firstly just evangelism. If you've ever listened to the orientation tapes, if you know anything about this movement's roots, it was not primarily just evangelism or missions or unreached people.

It was spirituality. And we were reared, some of us after our conversion, in an environment of heavy challenge about spirituality. If you sit under the feet of Alan Ridpath, as I did in Chicago, Redpath, it's all spirituality, it's the Lordship of Christ.

If you go to a place like Moody, you are hit every single day with some aspect of spirituality. And you watch the students around you, many of them crumble, as they are unable to really respond to this kind of environment. And I was reminded of this, again, as I'd just been ministering in Trinity Bible College in Florida, where Billy Graham went.

And if you read his autobiography, which is just at the market in paperback, I even got a \$2 discount at Walmart. I bought half of their stock, which isn't many, it's a retail place. But I was so excited that that book finally got out in paperback, and very, very attractive.

But as I poured myself out for two or three days at this college, and then over lunch with students, realized, many of the students didn't even go. They all are required to go to this chapel, but they didn't go. I thought, we had the ACMC conference was going on simultaneously, plus missionaries, visitors.

It's a relatively small meeting, maybe twice the size of this. And they had enough video equipment in there to make, I would have thought, a major movie. But I found out, of course, that a lot of the students didn't even go, even though it's required.

And, of course, that's not the main thing that's led me to share what's on my heart right now. But it's reminded me of how easily, at Bible College, and also in an OM environment, you can get so many challenges about spirituality, you can no longer absorb it. The whole challenge of prayer right now is a huge thing going on in the States.

I don't know how many are participating, in which a particular Christian leader has called people to 40 days of prayer and fasting. Now, the average evangelical has never fasted two days. They don't even go to any prayer meetings.

And yet, suddenly out of the blue, not quite out of the blue, but it's presented that if you really want to see America revived, if you really want to see what needs to happen, go and fast for 40 days. You can imagine the complexity of that for family people, for pastors. Usually it's certain amounts.

For some people it's a partial fast, at least having some kind of fruit juices or something. I talked to one man who just entered into it. And I know that in my own life, I have made, and I think I'm still making, and still struggling at least, false evaluations of people in terms of where they are spiritually, and whether God can use them or not, and whether they should be on OM long term.

We're hit with all kinds of decisions about people. Our movement is a movement of people. And I remember once, years ago, disagreeing with a particular leader, as I felt his level of rating people spiritually was too low.

People that he thought were basically spiritual people, that God could use. I can remember my reaction. What is he using as his measuring rock? Of course, if you've spent a lot of time in Tozer, and a lot of time in Watchman Knee, and a lot of time in Andrew Murray, and a lot of time in some of these other books, and heard all the messages that I've heard, not many people are coming up to that standard.

So it's great to preach these sermons, but how does that work out in practice? What if you marry someone that doesn't quite seem to fit in with Alan Redpath's definition of spirituality, or Tozer's, or Watchman Knee? A lot of these writers actually never said that much about marriage. If you look through old books, which are actually being pushed very much back on us these days, you'll find that most of them don't say much about some of the things we face today. What old book tells you how to handle the internet? Pornography on the internet is one of the number one practical problems Christians, especially the male species, are facing right now.

One mission society, I think I shared this with a few of you, took a survey and it blew their minds how many of their missionaries are in pornography on the internet. I just read that some of these companies now are getting names for their home page, or whatever they call it, which are very similar to famous names. So if you punch in Motorola and put an extra R, boom, you're into 500 nude women free of charge on your computer.

There's apparently one email or internet address which is very similar to something in connection with Washington. And apparently if you hit the wrong button or add one little letter, you go straight into a major pornography display. It is interesting that last night on the airplane, featured news on the American airline flight from Florida that I was on, they're talking about the internet and the impossibility of controlling things.

In America, the First Amendment provides an enormous amount of freedom of speech. And the government debated recently putting any controls on the internet. And the First Amendment and other factors came out.

There is no control whatsoever on the internet. Not true in other countries. In fact, on this interview, this particular program was featuring on the American militia movement and aspects of the militia movement that are completely, completely racist.

Make the Ku Klux Klan look like they're gentle. And they're pushing this stuff on the internet into Germany and they're getting lots of people in Germany, a neo-Nazi movement in Germany, clicking in and getting some of the most hateful material you could ever imagine. One of these famous Jewish institutes, a famous man, Isaac Wasserman, incredibly famous person, I'm probably just pronouncing it a little bit wrong.

His institute in America, used to be based in Vienna, are mainly watching what's going into the internet. And then they referred, this program wasn't about that, but they referred to a similar problem in connection with pornography, child pornography, every kind of mutilation. It is all there on the internet.

Now what do we find in some of the old books on this subject? Somebody will immediately say, well the basis for all these answers is found in the word. That's true. And so I hope you will be a diligent student of the word and come out with your message on how to handle the internet from the New Testament because the basics about discipline and moral purity and the other challenges are all there.

I guess this is partly on my heart because a friend of mine has been more or less removed from his pastorate because he had some struggle with pornography. As far as I can see it wasn't a huge thing, but he got into it for a while. And when he eventually confessed this, people did not know how to handle this confession.

And even now, though he's gone through many, many months of counseling and discipline and is completely free from this, he's been asked to leave. He's the founding pastor of this fellowship. He's been asked to leave for one year, one year's discipline.

And they will not restore him now until after, even though he's been through some discipline, they want him to go through more. Of course this is sort of splitting the church as some people feel this is too harsh and other people feel it should be more. And though this is happening way over in some little state in America, I've had a heavy conversation from someone who picked up news about it in China and felt that I, you know, George Furrow must get more involved and really get this thing more sorted out.

Right now many churches are going through nightmares trying to decide what is an acceptable level of spirituality for their pastor? What is an acceptable level of gifting? And in the process, in a big place like the States with a huge number of churches, thousands of pastors are burning out, collapsing under the pressure, or things come to the surface even from people's past. I call one city on the East Coast, none of this I'm adding to. Just out of the blue, I'm not interested in talking about any negative things, I'm just

saying hello to an old high school friend from New Jersey who we discovered because the ship went to that city.

And he just began to share that the whole city is feeling a dark cloud because a pastor who came in from another state, the absolute other end of the country where I happen to be at that time, and now people are making accusations about sexual abuse with young lads, and it looks like he may still be doing it there, and of course with what is going on in the White House. This is a main sort of cloud hanging over the United States at this time. I pick up the most negative feedback I've ever had concerning Billy Graham of all my years.

Three or four or five phone calls yesterday, all including the man in the church I preached at Sunday night, all sharing something about Billy Graham, and apparently in a hot interview program he was unbelievably soft about morality and Bill Clinton, probably Billy just trying to be the diplomat that he is, he has this friendship with Clinton, just tried to be, because I heard ten days ago he had a program with Larry King and I heard all positive things about that. But this was another one, and it's been hit big in main Wall Street Journal reporting. I don't know if any of you saw the article about Billy Graham in the Wall Street Journal.

Peter Mayton has just been given a subscription to Wall Street Journal, so he's digging up the article right now. Just to try to wind this down, tell you what I'm wrestling with in all this, is that I believe so often we either put the level of what true spirituality is too high, I believe many books do that, I really feel that very deeply, or we put it too low. And I'd encourage you, and maybe we can have some discussion, what is true spirituality? When can we say, well boy, that's a man or woman of God.

Have you ever had anybody say that about you? We leaders get people to say that about us, at least in the places where they like us. Places where they don't like us, they don't invite us, right? They don't introduce us and say, this guy's a real jerk and he's a nerd, but we've let him here this morning because somebody twisted my arm, and we thought we'd give him a try. It's like that preacher that got invited back, and he was so encouraged by the re-invitation.

But then the pastor gave him the truth, because he said, well, you know, we're very much into forgiveness here, and the first time you preached it, it was horrendous. And we wanted to give you another opportunity to try again. Boy, I tell you, it changed his position very quickly.

But just from my own heart, I lean towards saying that in a movement like OM, with all the spiritual input we have, we tend, number one, to not think we're that spiritual. We always think somebody else is spiritual. We do tend to put ourselves down.

We do tend to have spiritual inferiority feelings. You know, why isn't God using me? We tend to, I believe, get discouraged when we sin and fail in the same area again and again. And though we may not be heavy deliverance in our practice, in our minds, we tend to think, basically, we should be delivered of everything.

More and more in my counseling among more spiritually minded people, I see that they give the impression that basically, more or less, you should be perfect. And especially if you're a pastor. And certainly there can't be any difficulty in the sexual area.

And this sort of perfectionism, promoted very heavily by certain seminars, by certain people, and probably even by me years ago, before the whole grace message gripped me in a more realistic way and a lot of other things got pounded into my heart, I believe leads to a lot of people being discouraged. Even in

listening to some of the speakers and tapes in various places, I'm always listening to other people, they often put such a level of spirituality up, nobody's going to make it. And they've got a bunch of, you know, 1,000 moody Bible Institute students that are wrestling with all kinds of problems.

We don't need to go into the details. They get some high lofty message about true spirituality, knowing God. There's certain knowing God messages, knowing God books.

When you're finished reading them, you're absolutely sure you don't know God at all. Now, some temperaments, that's not such a big problem. I, fortunately, am that kind of temperament.

You know, I'm just not so easily intimidated. A lot of good foundation teaching before I was even 20 years of age. Somehow, when I hear these overwhelming messages, I just, you know, repent and claim and go forward again.

But other people of more sensitive temperament, different emotional and mental makeup, different background, different family situation, they get knocked out by these grace killers. Forgive my Charles Swindoll expression. And I just believe that OM still has a significant grace killing instinct right at its heart.

And I hope that before I go to heaven, somehow I can do more to help kill the grace killing instinct, which means I've got to be especially careful about myself. But even when you share this, you can turn that around and it becomes a grace killing message. Because we're going to go around and kill all grace killers and you know that you've got a grace killing instinct.

And so it's what you call a no-win situation. How many of you believe in the Christian life it's possible to get into situations where it's totally lose-lose? Do any of you believe that? Peter Conley believes that. We have a few followers.

Rosemary, Mark, wow. Rex is going to think about that a little more. But somehow, with some of the Lord's people that I meet, a lose-lose situation, it's not possible.

They will not accept that terminology. I was with a top Christian leader at one of our 82,000 meetings and I'm assuring that I felt we as a movement failed in a lot of ways. I mean, how could anyone have a brain and not see the failures of the 82,000 movement? It's beyond me.

But this brother, he immediately moved into high gear. He does not believe we should use that word failure as God's people. And that is not in our vocabulary.

Again, I didn't get into detailed conflict. The audience was maybe on, I don't know whose side they were on. Just to try to sum this up, I believe God is using people a lot more than they realize.

I believe people are often far more spiritual than they realize. And I believe that we don't give enough credit to the basics. If a man is living a life, or a woman, a basic form of purity, if they are people of basic integrity, they're not lying, they're not cheating, if they are fulfilling some of the very basics of the Christian life, and we know many people are not, but if they are, then I rate them.

I rate them much higher than I would 20 years ago. Maybe he's struggling in his prayer life. Maybe he's not lending anybody to Jesus Christ this week.

Maybe he isn't feeling the power of God every minute. Maybe he or she are having some difficulties in their marriage. Maybe he's not the totally Spirit-filled driver.

But to me, if these basics, even going back to the Ten Commandments, we all fail in some of those in one way or the other, especially if we look at our hearts. And I just feel, in general, we need to rate people a little higher. We need to rate people a little higher.

Why? Because most of the people out there in the churches we're going to, which we're all talking about esteeming in O.M. these days, I tell you, they are not in to this level of spirituality that sometimes we talk about. There may be a few, and they sometimes become the leading grace killers in the church because they believe all the other people who are not quite doing it this way or feeling it this way, they're sort of backslidden. We need to really get with them and pray they get into the victorious life, which may be true in some cases.

But in other cases, it may be that they manifest their spirituality differently. And one of the things that we find hard, especially some of us from the western so-called objective oriented world with all the books and all the spiritual intake, especially people in certain circles, when we get out across the world and see the people that God's using and then discover the problems they still have in their lives, it doesn't fit on the page. It doesn't fit on the page.

And I remember a leading professor in a meeting of charismatic leaders here in London which were trying to bring leaders of the new church charismatic movement in unity with missions. We had this professor from one of the leading Bible colleges give all these very elevated things and really launch a major attack against present day missions and the way people are going about things and the lack of spirituality, the lack of this. And I stood up at the end, a few of you know this story, and I said, you know, I'm sort of in your camp.

High level goals, integrity, spirituality. I said, I'm in your camp but could you explain why for 40 years I've seen God using so many complete jerks in such a powerful way to bring hundreds of thousands to himself. And the whole place burst out in applause and laughing because they are mature men and women who've seen that.

It's a mystery. Hell, there's lots of mysteries. Let's try to be a little more balanced, fair, grace awakened, mature, a bit like Paul when he wrote this letter concerning Philemon, the former slave.

Let's pray. Lord, maybe this ministry of your spirit as I prepared for this, maybe it's mainly for me. And forgive me when I have misjudged people.

Forgive me when I have made two and two equal eight. When I thought negatively about someone because they didn't seem to have much of a prayer life or they didn't seem to have a passion for world evangelism or they didn't seem to do it the way I thought perhaps it should be done. Lord, maybe in some circumstances I was right but Lord, forgive me for false evaluations of where people are spiritually.

And Lord, help the body of Christ continue to have high goals in the things of the spirit while at the same time maintain that biblical balance that pays attention to the basics and realizes how hard it is even to have some of these basics to stay away from basic lying, to stay away from their morality, to stay away from acts of hatred and violence and anger, to stay away from embezzlement and theft and things that Lord we can even end up in prison for and there are Christians in prison tonight because they didn't pay attention enough to those basics and enable us Lord to when we see people have the basics of the Christian faith to be able to encourage them to be able to honor them to be able to introduce them to other Christians or write letters like Paul wrote for the sake of Philemon to get him back into that situation. Lord,

we're overwhelmed when we think of the challenges and connection with what we've shared this evening. We don't have the time to discuss it tonight but perhaps Lord among ourselves and as we hear so many different things and get so many challenges help us to have that grace awake and balanced way of measuring ourselves, evaluating ourselves and measuring and evaluating other people and Father help us to in some cases not even make an evaluation until we have more facts and pray more and perhaps talk more.

I commit this to you thank you that you've not given up on OM and us and you're still working still changing people's lives the gospel is still going out and we think of so many of our graduates who we especially are wanting to be linked with many of them many of them are not in what they dreamed they would be when they were 19 but many of them are going on for you and that is the bottom line and we praise you whether they're in the kind of ministry we would like to see them in or they're in something completely different if they're going on for you, loving you attempting to walk with you keeping some kind of right accounts with you then we praise you for that and we want to affirm them and love them and encourage them to keep on keeping on even when they do have a failure or they do sin

do something that they may feel is so completely stupid we praise you we worship you in the midst of the challenge in Jesus name, Amen Amen just before I want to share this burden I almost forgot which is ridiculous because it's it's very serious how many of you remember the Parsi brothers Zoroastrian brother who came and shared in this very room, raise your hand he is one of the few converts from Zoroastrianism in the entire world and he has been for now over two years trying to do something among those people and to my amazement I had a long talk with him on the phone the other day he has been able to get very little, almost no backing at all apart from a little bit from us and our friend Jack in Canada so he's been pressing on his own and he did get his church at least to pray for they

won't support him Baptist church in Texas probably quite Baptist and wouldn't be able to comprehend what this guy is on about although I think they love him and I'm going to try to follow up with them but he has persisted in trying to share his faith with these people in India here United States, there are thousands of them here and in United States and many in Iran, he hasn't been able to get to that much, but in Pakistan and India the word is now out among their hierarchy about him and his life is definitely in danger they are very upset they've never had anybody like him that was a Zoroastrian teacher become a follower of Christ just unheard of they're much harder than Muslims and he might have shown up here tonight except he's on a cheap ticket wasn't sure he could get here by Tuesday

night and he is on his way I don't know whether I'm trying to I'm supposed to persuade him otherwise to the city in India where the high priest of Zoroastrian is two hours out of Bombay do any of you India people remember that name of that place it's half in my mind but if I pronounce it it will come out wrong but it's a small place the fire has been burning in this city for three thousand years and the high priest of Zoroastrianism are there and he feels now led since they're after him anyway to go right into the lion's mouth and declare the message of salvation he's very much on his own and I don't know what else to say except we are one of the few groups that related to him even in sharing his unreached people's vision he's been sort of pushed aside because there's not enough of these

people the unreached people if you're not over a million over half a million you don't get on the list there's all kinds of things that go on among these unreached people but here's a group that we know of hardly any converts we know of hardly anybody in the world's focusing on them or knows them they are mentioned and you can change the world with children's edition and we are one of the few that know this

brother who was converted out of this background so I thought we could at least pray for him he normally comes and stays with Parsi friends don't confuse Parsis or Astrons with Farsi language of Iranians that's totally different they sound very similar don't they but because of the persecution and things against him he really can't stay so he may be staying with one of us during his

short time here and if you know of someone that would like to accompany him to the heart of the lion's den outside Bombay maybe give me a phone call would definitely give that a priority willing to put some finance into it yes father we unite for this brother we realize his life is now in danger we realize he's very much alone with this so neglected people's group we pray you would show him any others who are actively working and will want to work among these peoples we realize that I only discovered even his Jesus films are in Hindi and English and Gujarati not in the language of these people though many of them know these other languages but it just shows how forgotten how left out the Parsi and Zoroastrian people are we understand this headquarters in India is probably even for those

of us who might consider ourselves very balanced a very demonized place and we cry out to you and stand against the forces of darkness that there could come a breakthrough among the Parsis Zoroastrians and even here in Great Britain where we know no one working among them in Britain no one working among them in the United States many many thousands and we pray raise up some who would put these people on the spiritual map in Jesus name Amen as you know this recent week we've seen a lot of things happen on the on TV or news whatever something new happening from Yugoslavia the war is over in some parts that is you can see that in Bosnia and Croatia and all we thought in the beginning before the firming was straight up it will start in this country and spread and what happened the opposite it

started on the top Croatia and came to this country now this one is the most dangerous for many reasons political reasons and I just read on the paper that this is the most dangerous because in this nation we have 90% of the Albanian population pronounce that for us Kosovo if something happens in this country Albanians they cannot say just just find political solution because we are brothers by blood we are the same nation we have Albanians in Montenegro in Macedonia and if something happens Albanians will attack here Macedonians they cannot remain anymore in the same part because 25 to 40% of the Albanian population is in Macedonia only but again Macedonians we don't recognize because their language is not official according to them Greece we don't recognize Macedonia either because of

their province called Macedonia and Albanians because of their own population and everything is getting more and more complicated now what's happening in this country Serbians they want still to kill as much as they can Albanians with one aim as we call it ethnic cleansing they start here somewhere in a place called Drenita yesterday I went to some demonstrations and there were 100,000 Albanians in London at the same time in the capital of Kosovo Pristina there were more than 50,000 Albanians and here I've got a picture of ladies waving white paper which means Albanians have no rights in that country at the same time here I've got something else which says that the Albanian army is here in Kukes and is quite ready to attack last night I heard from the Albanian president of Albania who

said that in fact he is blaming the Serbian president Milosevic who started this attack this it won't get changed quite easily in Donetsk today we had a special meeting emergency meeting regarding this country and they have decided in 10 days they gave 10 days to president Milosevic to do something that means to accept that Albanians would have a meeting with Belgrade because everything comes from there if they don't have the war won't stop it will continue more and more now the other thing I want to mention is that Turks which are here somewhere they said we cannot stay indifferent about this country

because they have some kind of history in this country because Albanians are Muslim 90% and at the same time we had demonstrations in Istanbul more than 3000 Albanians we had demonstrations

in Ankara in Athens and in all Western Europe so I just heard the official number of killed 80 people within a week that's official but this number is much higher because many people are dead on the fields and they cannot have access to go and collect bodies of their brothers and sisters or mothers and fathers who are they because Red Cross which is recognizing the whole world didn't get permission to go and heal the wounded people what I really want to say is at least so we can find a way and send some aid there I was in touch with an ex-armour he's got one truck or a lorry or more of food and post and a bit of drugs and he said that they need to raise 3000 pounds so we have to pray for that as well God's miracle will do before I finish just let me say that this is the Albanian flag if

you want if you've never seen one this is the same flag in both countries whenever Albanians red and black it's quite old from the 15th century yeah and I think that's it in brief and really I don't know which prayer request to ask anymore because the only thing I want is that this country will find what they want what they deserve we cannot say anymore another Serbia and the most complicated thing is this because this country we don't have we don't have army we don't have the police nothing the only thing we have is white paper that means nothing so do pray please is that where you were born?

I was born here wow Lord we thank you for this burden you put on our brother Samir's heart we know it's especially hard for him to see his countrymen being killed and to see these people have no rights just sort of chaotic kind of situation and we pray for the resolution of this problem here most of us are probably ignorant about this little land of Kosovo and we now have our eyes have been opened and we want to be involved in Jesus name amen let's have several others pray cry out to God for this situation

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