



Spirituality: a conversational journey (pt. 1)

— 01/04/2012

In this post I am building on 4 elements of good conversation and Spirituality: form or flow?. My thinking has been shaped by many different inputs, but here is perhaps most heavily influenced by Kevin Vanhoozer's *The Drama of Doctrine* and ongoing dialogue with my brother Andrew (*hypotyposis*). Vanhoozer explicates the Scriptures as unfolding drama, which corresponds at many points with *conversational journey*. Andrew's approach to spirituality is more sacramental while mine is more anabaptist; we are both committed to "a theology of the Word" and our conversations are enriching.

==

My wife has challenged me to speak topically to our church in plain language about what it means to be a Christian. Thanks, Tiffani! We are going to take a break from our ongoing series in Genesis and Mark for enough time to sketch a basic spirituality.

==

Why is a new way of talking about spirituality needed? Look around your church, and count how many families have children who have not walked away from consistent involvement in a church. Any church. I'm doing a basic survey of the church I have pastored now for two years. The poll is still in progress, but here are the most popular answers for five of the questions:

- 89% say about both **Bible reading** and **prayer**: "I think it is important, but I wish I did it more."
- 67% say it has been over a month since they read **a chapter or more of the Bible**.
- 44% say that when they pick up **the Bible**, "I feel like I should be interested, but I am not actually interested."
- 67% say it has been over a month since they gave away cash or a gift **worth 10% or more of their last paycheck**.
- 67% also say in regard to **doing something generous** for someone else, "It feels like something I should be doing."

I grew up with a type of spirituality that said the Bible was God talking to us, and prayer was us talking to God. Preaching and hymn singing were sacraments, rituals that God touched us through if they were undertaken properly.

Some people think about spirituality in terms of "means of grace" which are the normal ways God works in human lives. One evangelical theologian's list includes: teaching of the Word, baptism, the Lord's Supper, prayer for one another, worship, church discipline, giving, spiritual gifts, fellowship, evangelism, and personal ministry to individuals (W. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 951). The idea here is that God is gracing believers through these various activities.

I would like to propose a different structure for understanding spirituality. It is not the one-way lecture directed by God toward people (the Bible) or the one-way lecture directed by people toward God (prayer). It is also not the "means of grace" which so easily can turn on their head from "ways God blesses people" to "ways people work hard and feel very guilty trying to ascend toward God." Perhaps you are familiar with another way of looking at spirituality that you could throw in here. Go right ahead.

==

What is spirituality? What is the "devotional life" of believers in the Bible? When I crack my Bible open and start looking, I find a surprising lack of evidence for anything like the piety I have been taught in church.

After the fall, we get some sense that God was accustomed to walking in the garden in the evening with Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:8).

Some people might say Abel is the first "godly" man, but it is reading into the text of Gen. 4 to say that God chose Abel's sacrifice because it was in substance better than Cain's. If anything, we might say that God declared a certain verdict on the sacrifices (1 John 3:12). The issue in the text is how Cain responded to what happened, namely by murdering his brother about whom we know very little.

There is a tantalizing little clue about spirituality in Gen. 5:21-24: Enoch walked with God. The text repeats it, in case you missed it the first time.

We get our first more complete picture of a spiritual person with Noah. What does the Bible say about Noah? In Gen. 6:8: "Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord." In Gen. 6:9: "Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God." Noah's obedience to God's commands is emphasized again and again (Gen. 6:22, 7:5, 7:9, 7:16). We don't see Noah praying. We don't see Noah singing. There is no Bible for Noah to read. When he finally disembarks, we do find Noah building an altar to God on which he makes a sacrifice (Gen. 8:20). What else do we know about Noah? He plants a vineyard and gets drunk (Gen. 9:20-21). We have a poetic curse (Gen. 9:25) on his sexually deviant son, and a poetic blessing on his two brothers (Gen. 9:26-27). This is what we know about the spirituality of Noah. Oh, one more thing, he is mentioned elsewhere in Scripture. His name is evoked by God himself as a spiritual giant of Israel along with Daniel and Job (Ezek. 14:14, 20). Noah was a man of faith, acting obediently to God's commands and serving as "a herald of righteousness" (Heb. 11:7, 2 Pet. 2:5).

What is my point? Because of a high view of Scripture, believing it should all be systematized because it came from one God, we have amalgamated every aspect of every spiritual person to figure out methods for becoming godly people. But we do not find people in the Bible who act like that! Noah is not David. Noah is not Steven the martyr. Noah is not Paul. Noah is not Jesus. Noah is Noah. There is no biblical evidence for any of the marks of spirituality as we have been taught they should look!

What this all comes around to is that perhaps a better structure for spirituality would be that of *conversational journey*.

Christianity is a journey. And it is a conversation. More soon...

Jon Wymer

profanefait@gmail.com

Rate this:   Rate This

Share this:     0

Like this:  Like Be the first to like this post.

Posted in *walking with*

god

Tagged *journey, Jesus, spirituality, noah, godliness, Christianity, conversation, david, job, daniel, godly, dialogue*

Interact here...

Enter your comment here...

Fill in your details below or click an icon to log in:



Web2PDF

converted by Web2PDFConvert.com

 Email (required) (Not published)

Name (required)

Website

- Notify me of follow-up comments via email.
- Notify me of new posts via email.

Post Comment

← [Constructing your true extended family](#)

[Interview: Reformation scholar Amy Burnett](#) →

RECENT PROFANITY

- [Spiritual disciplines survey results](#)
- [Peterson on daily work as holy](#)
- [Spirituality: a conversational journey \(pt. 3\)](#)
- [Goroney on hospital visits](#)
- [Spirituality: a conversational journey \(pt. 2\)](#)
- [Interview: Reformation scholar Amy Burnett](#)
- [Spirituality: a conversational journey \(pt. 1\)](#)
- [Constructing your true extended family](#)

READING NOW

goodreads®

THE WATER'S FINE

Enter your email to receive notifications of new ProfaneFaith.com articles.

Join 218 other followers

jump!

PROFANE TOPICS

- [book reviews \(1\)](#)
- [church newsletter \(1\)](#)
- [effing beautiful \(1\)](#)
- [interviews \(1\)](#)
- [legacy posts \(164\)](#)
- [reading the bible \(1\)](#)
- [state of the blog \(1\)](#)
- [treasure chest \(5\)](#)
- [unsorted \(4\)](#)
- [walking with god \(6\)](#)

PROFANE FILEROOM

- [January 2012 \(11\)](#)
- [December 2011 \(31\)](#)
- [November 2011 \(26\)](#)

- [October 2011 \(24\)](#)
- [September 2011 \(13\)](#)
- [August 2011 \(4\)](#)
- [July 2011 \(5\)](#)
- [June 2011 \(13\)](#)
- [May 2011 \(8\)](#)
- [April 2011 \(15\)](#)
- [March 2011 \(8\)](#)
- [February 2011 \(19\)](#)
- [January 2011 \(7\)](#)

[abel](#) [Amy Burnett](#) [Bartholomew](#) [Bible bible reading](#) [cain](#) [Calvin Studies Society](#) **Christianity** [church](#) [community](#)
[conversation](#) [conversational](#) **dialogue** [drama](#) [elements](#) [Eugene Peterson](#) [everyday faith](#) [familia Dei](#) [generosity](#) **God** [Goheen](#)
[good conversation](#) [grace](#) [individualism](#) **Jesus** [John Calvin](#) [Jordan Mogck](#) [journey](#) [justification](#) [missional](#) [parish](#) [pastor](#) **prayer**
[Reformation](#) [sanctification](#) **spiritual disciplines** **spirituality** [survey](#) [The Drama of Doctrine](#) [theology of glory](#)
[theology of the cross](#) [three-dimensional](#) [vocation](#) [work](#)

LOOKING FOR SOMETHING?

CREATIVE LICENSE



ProfaneFaith.com by Jon Wymer is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License](#).

COMMENT POLICY

Keep your comments positive. Rude comments get deleted. It's fine to be critical, but make it constructive. If you are consistently negative or generally a jerk, you will get banned. The definition of terms is left solely up to me.

Blog at [WordPress.com](#). | Theme: [Reddle](#) by Automattic. Fonts on this blog.

