

Last Sunday we looked at spiritual renewal through the lens of the buildings that have been renewed in the Cumberland St/Crawford St area of the city, although I did note renewal wasn't restricted to that area. On further reflection I observe that all the renewed buildings have been put to good use – another parallel with spiritual renewal. Spiritual renewal is never for us. We also read many of the texts that use the words renew, renewed, renewing and renewal.

Today I'd like to talk about personal spiritual renewal taking a slightly different tack. On one of the Sundays we were on holiday the preacher spoke about a believer's vital signs using bodies rather than buildings as a comparison. What a spiritually renewed person needs to show above all else is signs of life so I thought it would be good to follow this up. Once again I feel I'm using Scripture in a slightly proof-texting way – but it is God's message to us and it has the power to address us.

So how do we know we're in reasonable health; what measures could we use and how do they relate to the spiritual life – the January preacher suggested there were 5 vital signs – the medical people among us may like to debate this?

Five vital signs

I Pulse rate – not too fast, not too slow. When our older daughter drank Harmony suede shoe cleaner in 1977 it contained a chemical similar to that used in anaesthetics. When we got to Christchurch hospital, long after the ambulance, her heart was beating very, very slowly; when we saw her the next morning after a very long sleep she wasn't there – she'd tried to climb out of her cot, had fallen and was being x-rayed for possible broken ribs. When we finally saw her, her heart was racing, the difference was unbelievable.

Experts say that a normal pulse rate is somewhere between 60 and 100. As I was typing this I discovered mine was a somewhat medically induced 70 – know what I mean?

PULSE RATE

From a spiritual point of view the question comes - does our heart beat in rhythm with Jesus heart? Both Trudy and I have spent one night in the Emergency Department of the hospital with hearts out of rhythm – Trudy when we lived at 10 Corstorphine Road - now considerably fire damaged; me 10 days after we moved into our then new home. For those who've experienced this it can be scary and physically draining. I'm aware some live with this on a daily basis. Never did work out what Trudy's was (maybe being too close to me – you know, 'Oh doctor I'm in trouble, well goodness gracious me); mine was a lack of potassium – more bananas I thought but they only come 10th in the list of potassium-rich foods.

A regularly beating heart is a good thing. A heart that beats in rhythm with Jesus is a good thing. Maybe we all need a Holy Spirit pacemaker so that if we get out of harmony with Jesus he can jolt us back on track.

SCRIPTURE: Ezekiel 36:26

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

II Blood Pressure – not too high, not too low. Am I the only one who gets white coat syndrome when the doctor puts the sleeve round my arm? I reckon they should take at least 10 whatever the measure is off both the diastolic and systolic numbers.

BLOOD PRESSURE

Healthy blood pressure means that we live comfortably in our bodies. We need blood pressure but not too much or too little. High blood pressure can lead to a range of illnesses – some quite devastating in their effects. Low blood pressure is also a problem, one I'm not currently familiar with, but it's usually the result of something else not being quite right. Again it can be devastating in its effects. Blood pressure in the normal range speaks to me of contentment in the spiritual journey.

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 4:11b-12

I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

Paul speaks of being content in a material sense – in need and in plenty but surely that can be extended to be content with our situation, with who we are.

So what is the connection between spiritual renewal and contentment? Simply that a person renewed in the Holy Spirit, walking with Jesus learns to live with themselves and their circumstances – that does open up a whole lot of questions which will have to be for another day.

III Breathing – not difficult, not struggling all the time but easy and relaxed. Many of us have seen someone struggling to breathe; it's not a pretty sight and usually indicates major trouble or the potential expiry of life.

BREATHING

Often breathing in spiritual terms is connected to praying. I'd like to go beyond that and suggest that healthy breathing is receiving from God through his Spirit and expressing that before others – we receive spiritual awareness, life, compassion, hope through the work of the Spirit and we metaphorically breathe it out over those around us.

SCRIPTURE: John 20:21-3

21 Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' 22 And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.'

IV Body Temperature – not too hot, not too cold – just right, isn't that what as read in the Goldilocks porridge story. For those who've been parents remember when your baby had a temperature of over 100 – the panicky feeling, the threat of a convulsion which personal observation teaches me is terrifying – that's being too hot. Our sons all had one convulsion. Conversely too low and we're gone – did you see the film Everest? It was too cold on the mountain – for some their temperatures got lower and lower until it was impossible for them to survive. I know some have survived in the cold for a long time but it's the exception not the rule.

BODY TEMPERATURE

The need for a regular temperature speaks to me of a consistent walk in God.

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 1:27

27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit

A person renewed in the Spirit walks, lives consistently

V Reflexes/reactions – what does my knee do when it's tapped with a rubber hammer, how do I respond to having light shone in my eye? How about when I'm afraid?

REFLEXES/REACTIONS

Someone told me this week that, in their work situation, they get abused regularly – loud and long and a bit short in imagination and choice of words; actually I've since heard they're no longer putting up with that behaviour. I didn't ask what their reaction was to the abuse; the person simply decided they didn't need to put up with it any more. As an aside (in my notes) could I just say it's not good for many in the work place at the moment – we've gone from so called 'union power' to the stage where it appears all the power belongs to the employer. Most employers of course are fair and reasonable but there are always those who aren't and there are fewer and fewer protections for workers. Balance is needed. That was by way of introduction to the issue of reflexes and reactions.

My initial reaction to another or even when there's no one else around; my behaviour towards others is a measure of my relationship with Jesus.

In the community of believers

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 2:1-4

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

The rule of love and its manifold expressions; the rule of humility

To those outside the community of believers

SCRIPTURE: Colossians 4:5-6

⁵ Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. ⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Jesus said in John 10:10 **'The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.'**

A full life, a vital life, a healthy life – a renewed life: how does this relate to our 5 vital signs?

We pray:

Lord, let my heart beat in time with you

Lord, let my spiritual blood pressure be in the normal range

Lord, let me embrace your Spirit in my life on a daily basis

Lord, may there be a consistency in my walk with Jesus

Lord, let me react in a Spirit-enhanced way to those around me