

# INTERACTIVE SUNDAY #4

By Rev. Will Nelken

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**How is a Christian to live in a world where everything is focused on “I” and “me”? Isn’t the main focus of the Bible, instead, the body of Christ (the Church)?**

Is there really a “me-focus” in our culture? How have you seen it expressed or demonstrated?

American culture is strongly individualistic. It is stimulated by our democratic ideals (every person has a vote; therefore, every voter counts!) and our capitalistic pursuits (the American Dream, from rags to riches).

Of course, such an attitude isn’t limited to Americans, and actually is rooted more deeply in each human’s psyche. Self-awareness and self-determination are woven into the fabric of our being, for we have been made, according to the Bible, *“in the image of God”* (Genesis 1:27). God is utterly independent and thoroughly self-aware, so it follows that we should evidence similar traits.

Nonetheless, however similar we may feel or imagine ourselves to be, God’s revelation to us in Holy Scriptures clearly indicates that we are not Him. We are not God—not individually, not collectively.

Therefore, it stands to reason that our self-awareness is limited.

Accordingly, the prophet, Jeremiah, wrote: *“The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?”* (Jeremiah 17:9).

Not only is self-awareness limited, but our self-determination is also limited.

*“Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand”* (Proverbs 19:21).

We are *not* in control.

But we can be in concert with the One who *is* in control of all things. This is what faith in Jesus Christ offers us.

Jesus warned: *“So don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’ These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and He will give you everything you need”* (Matthew 6:31-33).

If we *“seek first the Kingdom of God,”* then we will begin to see all else in its relation to the Kingdom of God. We will ask, Does it belong to Christ’s Kingdom, or does it come from another kingdom? And correspondingly, Does it serve my destiny in Christ, or pervert it or hinder it? Such questions will produce in us an eternal perspective of our temporal circumstances. They will add to our wisdom and safeguard our future.

## **Avoid Infection**

Now, all that I have just said is how we may *break out* of the “meism” of our culture. The question before us is, how are we to live *within the culture*, without falling prey to the same self-absorption? Can we engage the culture without being bitten by the bug?

Actually, this is how the Bible describes ordinary New Testament living! The Scriptures prepare us for this very challenge! Here’s the first of two examples (this one from The Message):

*“Don’t be naive. There are difficult times ahead. As the end approaches, people are going to be self-absorbed, money-hungry, self-promoting, stuck-up, profane, contemptuous of parents, crude, coarse, dog-eat-dog, unbending, slanderers, impulsively wild, savage, cynical, treacherous, ruthless, bloated windbags, addicted to lust, and allergic to God. They’ll make a show of religion, but behind the scenes they’re animals. Stay clear of these people”*  
(2 Timothy 3:1-5).

Another translation puts it: *“They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly. Stay away from people like that!”*

Now, this doesn’t mean we should isolate ourselves from such people, because if it did, it would mean leaving this world altogether. What it does mean is not to become enchanted with or entrapped by their ways, not to become like them; maintain your Christian distinctiveness.

Religious appearance and religious behavior are not the same thing as being godly! Godliness requires *power*, not just religion! That’s the power Jesus promised in Acts 1:8, when He said:

*“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.”*

That was also the standard by which Paul measured genuine Christian leaders:

*“I’ll find out whether these arrogant people just give pretentious speeches or whether they really have God’s power. For the Kingdom of God is not just a lot of talk; it is living by God’s power” (1 Corinthians 4:19-20).*

Have you received the power of the Holy Spirit for your life?

## **Spiritual Health**

Because, if you are not spiritually healthy yourself, there is little help you can offer to others.

But we should never confuse “health” with “perfection.” Health—physical or spiritual—demands constant attention, frequent adjustment, and occasional treatment, both to maintain it and to increase it, and it always includes vulnerabilities. So, perfection is not the goal; rather, the signs of spiritual vitality—such as prayer, faith, worship, and service—that are not luke-warm.

How are your spiritual vital signs today?

Have you taken time to pray—alone with God? God has promised to reveal Himself to you: *“In those days when you pray, I will listen. If you look for Me wholeheartedly, you will find Me.* (Jeremiah 29:12-13).

How is your faith? Without it, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6), because whatever does not arise from faith is sin (Romans 14:23). Faith is your lifeblood. So what is your spiritual pulse—your rhythm of active faith?

And how is your worship? Worship is your spiritual breath—“breathing in Your grace, breathing out Your praise; breathing in Your grace, breathing out Your praise.” Is your active devotion to God sufficient to keep your grace-level near 100%?

Do you actively serve the Lord? I don’t mean do you read your Bible—that’s just *preparation* for service, like eating a good breakfast before going to your daily job.

And I don’t mean what you get paid for, but what you do in His name for someone else, when no one but God is tracking you. Where are you volunteering? You can do so from your home, in the church, with your co-workers, or in the community.

Prayer, faith, worship, and service—these are the vital signs of your spiritual health. Keeping these alive in a “me-focused” world is an everyday challenge! But it’s what we’re called to do in these “evil days,” by the power of the Holy Spirit working in us.

## **In the World, But Not Of It**

Here's the second example of Scriptural preparation for living victoriously in a self-absorbed world, from Paul's letter to Pastor Titus:

*"For the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people. And we are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to God, while we look forward with hope to that wonderful day when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed. He gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us his very own people, totally committed to doing good deeds."* (Titus 2:11-14)

We each need to practice four things to successfully follow Jesus in this evil world (Do you have any doubt that the world is full of evil?): wisdom, righteousness, devotion to God, and the blessed hope of Christ's return.

Wisdom – *"If anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask God for it, for He gives it generously, without scorn"* (James 1:5). This is practical prayer.

Righteousness – *"I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with Himself depends on faith"* (Philippians 3:9). This is practical faith.

Devotion to God – *"Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases Him"* (Philippians 2:12-13). This is practical worship.

Look forward with hope – *"I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in Him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit"* (Romans 15:13). This leads us to practical service.

## **For the Cause of Christ**

We each need wisdom, righteousness, devotion, and hope... but to what end, for what purpose? In order to be, as Paul wrote, *"totally committed to doing good deeds."*

This is what you were made for. This is what you've been born for, and born-again for. This is the will of God for your life: *"totally committed to doing good deeds."*

But *"doing good deeds"* is not something you do for yourself; it is something you do for someone else.

You are to take whatever is given to you and turn it into something good... for someone else's sake.

Hospitality (in attitude and action) is the major form of serving other people; it is a practice we must learn and improve.

Just think about the root of this word: *hospitality*.

What is a *hospital* for? Not merely medicine or medical treatments. It's for providing appropriate care for people in need. Originally, *hospitals* served for the reception of pilgrims (those on pilgrimage to the Holy Land or a shrine).

Hospitality is driven by the same vision—to provide appropriate care for guests and visitors, whether in the home or in the church.

### **School of the Spirit**

The local church is to be our classroom and laboratory! God has put us together in this way so that we might learn to show Christian love and hospitality, in the midst of the challenges of our diversity. When we love one another, we validate the claims of Christ and inspire the world to trust Him, just as He said:

*“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”* (John 13:34-35).

We ignore this command at our own risk, for faith cannot survive in a vacuum. All of the necessary challenges, and all of the essential opportunities are right here, in the midst of the family of God.

When we learn to love what and whom God loves, then we are following Jesus, and truly living our faith.

### **A Practical Plan**

Now, I want you to make a plan to measure your spiritual vital signs each day this week, by three simple acts. (Write this down.)

(1) Plan to begin each day with prayer for three things:

- That God will encourage you to trust Him in the face of any challenge.
- That you will offer God worship whenever He shows you or reminds you of His handiwork.

- That God will nudge you when there is an opportunity to serve someone else in His name.

(2) Then, at the end of each day, ask yourself three questions (don't judge, just reflect):

- How was my faith activated today?
- Did I worship God frequently or seldom?
- How was I able to serve others?

(3) Finally, before you sleep, thank God for His faithfulness and for His power at work in you.

If you will sincerely do these three things each day, no matter how briefly, your faith and love will grow... this week!

Will you purpose to try these steps with me this week?