

**TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH  
MINOCQUA, WI  
SERMON FOR OCTOBER 4 & 5, 2020**

*In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes, who was a Mede by descent and who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans— in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the scrolls that, according to the word of the Lord given to the prophet Jeremiah, the number of years it would take to complete the devastation of Jerusalem was seventy years.*

*With fasting, sackcloth, and ashes I turned my face to the Lord God to seek him in prayer and to plead for grace. I prayed to the Lord, my God, and I made confession.*

*Please, Lord, you are the great God, who is to be feared, who keeps the covenant, and who shows mercy to those who love him and keep his commands. We have sinned. We have been guilty. We have acted wickedly. We have rebelled and turned aside from your commands and standards. We did not listen to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, officials, and fathers and to all the people of the land.*

*Righteousness is yours, Lord, but we are filled with shame this day—we the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all Israel, both near and far, in all the lands where you have banished them because of the treachery with which they betrayed you. Lord, we are filled with shame—our kings, our officials, and our fathers, who sinned against you. Acts of compassion and forgiveness belong to the Lord our God, even though we have rebelled against him. We did not listen to the voice of the Lord our God by walking according to his laws that he set before us through the hand of his servants, the prophets. All Israel violated your law and turned away by not listening to your voice. So you poured out the curse on us and fulfilled the oath that is written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, because we sinned against him.*

*God has fulfilled the words that he spoke against us and against our judges by bringing such a great disaster upon us. What was done in Jerusalem has never been done under all of heaven. As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster came upon us, but we did not seek the favor of the Lord our God to turn from our guilt and to gain insight into your truth. Therefore, the Lord watched over the disaster and brought it upon us, because the Lord our God is righteous in everything he does, but we did not listen to his voice.*

*And now, Lord our God, you who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and who made a name for yourself to this very day, we have sinned, we have acted wickedly. Lord, according to all your righteous acts, let your anger and wrath turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy mountain, although, because of our sins and the guilt of our fathers, Jerusalem and your people are viewed with contempt by everyone around us.*

*Now listen, our God, to the prayer of your servant and to his plea for grace, and let your face shine upon your desolate sanctuary for your sake, my Lord. My God, turn your ear toward us and listen. Open your eyes and see the desolation that is upon us and the city that is called by your name. No, it is not because of our righteous acts that we are casting our plea for grace before you, but because of your great acts of compassion. Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, pay attention! Act, and do not delay—for your sake, my God, because your city and your people are called by your name.*

(Daniel 9:1-19 EHV)

“I am spiritual, but not religious.” This is quite a popular mantra these days, especially for people who don’t attend worship on a regular basis. Hint: Christmas and Easter, as well as an occasional wedding or funeral, are not considered “regular”; nor is frequently uttering “omg” or some such considered worship. Rather than participate in organized religion, which is “so messed up,” more are simply saying, “I am spiritual/I am a spiritual person.”

“I see God in nature, in the trees, in the sunset, in the ocean, in a rainbow, in the laughter and cute sayings of children. I’ve come to realize that I’m not really religious, I don’t want to be confined within doctrine and teaching of a particular church, but I am deeply spiritual.” The person who self-proclaims such a self-developing spirituality will expect you religious, churchgoing folk to be blown away by the wisdom and depth of that amazing expression.

Well, where do all those amazing gifts come from? Really, only self-anointed “spiritual people” see God in nature? And no one else does? Ever read a psalm that praised God for his amazing handiwork in nature? There are dozens. The book of Job has several chapters on the subject. Ever hear Jesus say, “Let the little children come to me...they are precious, the kingdom belongs to them?” If you’ve read the Bible, you have.

“I am spiritual, but not religious” has become so popular, it even has its own acronym (SBNR) and a website dedicated to **“open source spirituality.”** The folks who run this website/organization refrain from using the word “truth” because it is **“a tricky word that leads into discussions of absolute versus relative truth, which becomes too esoteric for our purpose.”** They’d rather use the word wisdom; their stated tagline is: **“All religions contain some wisdom, but no one religion contains all wisdom.”**

Daniel would not be impressed by today’s so-called “spirituality.” The best way to approach this is to look at the **REAL SPIRITUALITY** held to and practiced by Daniel. Trust me, it looks nothing like today’s version/the latest version of Satan’s age old lie in the Garden of Eden.

The first contrast between today’s spirituality and the real spirituality practiced by Daniel is the heart of the matter: where is it centered, where is it based? Today’s spirituality is self-centered, it’s about what I think and feel and choose to believe. I think for myself, I’m not some sheep just blindly going with the crowd and following a lone voice who claims to have all the answers.

And therein lies the problem: there is one Voice that has all the answers, all truth, all wisdom. There is one Shepherd whose Voice we must hear above all others. Daniel shows us that real spirituality is God-centered. Which god? The God of the Bible, thus real spirituality is Word-centered as well. We find answers and wisdom not within ourselves, but outside of ourselves in God’s external Word.

***“In the first year of (the reign of) Darius son of Xerxes...I, Daniel, understood from the scrolls that, according to the word of the Lord given to the prophet Jeremiah, the number of years it would take to complete the devastation of Jerusalem was seventy years.”*** (vv. 1,2) Daniel’s not looking at the sunset for inspiration or checking Twitter for catchy, sloganized encouragement, he’s reading the Bible. The Old Testament isn’t quite done yet, it isn’t all written down yet, but he’s got some sacred scrolls in his possession, perhaps all of the Old Testament written up until that time, which would have been most of it.

Daniel had been in the first wave of exiles sent to Babylon 67 years ago. He’s now in his 80s, but his pulse quickens as he reads this – after 70 years, and Jerusalem will be restored? This could mean within a couple years, which is when exiles actually began returning to Jerusalem (c.a. 605-536 BC), or it could be another 20 years or so (Temple was destroyed in 586 BC and was rebuilt in 516 BC).

Either way, Daniel demonstrates real spirituality by given attention to God and his Word. He’d done it all lifelong; we’ve heard about it all through the book of Daniel, from chapter 1, when just a teenager through last week’s focus on chapter 6, while in the lions’ den. Anyone who claims to be “spiritual” but doesn’t spend much time in the Word of God through which the Spirit actually works, is living an empty, powerless, self-centered existence rather than the God-centered, Word-centered life Daniel lived. Please do enjoy nature, sunsets, the ocean, the Northwoods in all of its four-season glory, witty children’s sayings – just don’t miss out on real spirituality, don’t miss out on the Word of God.

The second powerful contrast between today’s spirituality and real spirituality has to do with attitude. Today’s culture-heavy spirituality pushes arrogance. This can be seen in self-justification and excuses. “Hey, I couldn’t help it” or “Not my fault” or “I did my best” or “Who are you to judge me” Essentially, I can’t be held accountable for my wrong doings. It’s out there. It’s in here (in our hearts, by nature).

Daniel's approach? Humility and repentance. His prayer on behalf of his people is amazing. He doesn't say, "Well, it's about time. 70 years is a long time to punish us for stuff. We're not really that bad, I mean, take a look around at other nations and their false gods. We're pretty good, by comparison. We're your people. How can you treat us this way?" Listen to the humility. Listen to how many times and in how many different ways he expresses sorrow and repentance: ***"We have sinned. We have been guilty. We have acted wickedly. We have rebelled and turned aside from your commands and standards. We did not listen to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, officials, and fathers and to all the people of the land."*** (vv. 5,6)

Two verses, six different expressions of repentance. And he's only getting started. ***"All Israel violated your law and turned away by not listening to your voice...We did not seek the favor of the Lord our God to turn from our guilt and to gain insight into your truth."*** (vv. 11,13b)

Nothing in the realm of arrogance as is often heard today, "God, we know you want us to be happy. When we're happy, you're happy – we think, at least we like to think so – so bless us/me(!) with your favor and gift us/me(!) with whatever we ask of you."

Instead, repentance and humility, with a focus on the Lord and an appeal to his mercy: ***"Now, Lord our God, you who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and who made a name for yourself to this very day...Lord, according to all your righteous acts, let your anger and wrath turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy mountain...Let your face shine upon your desolate sanctuary for your sake, my Lord. My God, turn your ear toward us and listen....No, it is not because of our righteous acts that we are casting our plea for grace before you, but because of your great acts of compassion. Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, pay attention! Act, and do not delay—for your sake, my God, because your city and your people are called by your name."*** (portions of vv. 15-19)

Real spirituality. It's not about me, it's about He/Him, the one true God of mercy and grace who kept his promise to forgive by sending his Son to live and die and live again and who keeps us promises to sustain and bless and keep us in his care.

It is the height of arrogance to approach God with anything other than repentance and humility. Upon hearing and receiving his undeserved and unconditional forgiveness and grace – as we do weekly in worship, and daily in personal devotion/study time – we want to offer nothing less than a whole life response of praise.

Final contrast for our consideration: today's spirituality emphasizes the individual above all else, because it's following the lie of Satan- you can be like God, you decide what's best, your faith is a private thing so you choose what works for you. No one else has to agree with you, but no one can judge you, and everyone must affirm your right to be in charge of your own spirituality. What we're talking about here – with apologies to Apple, which continues to cater to the individual with iEverything – is really iSpirituality.

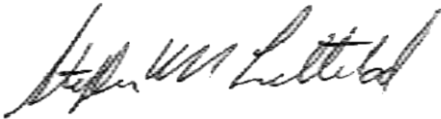
True, no one can take away a person's right to be self-centered, and self-justified, and just plain wrong. But faith isn't just a private matter. Real spirituality highlights the fact that faith is shared, it's a group thing, a public matter. Daniel showed this in the ordeal that led to him being thrown into the lions' den. Even after the decree to not worship anyone other than the king, he still prayed and worshipped ***"just as he had done before"*** – publicly. Here he doesn't just use "I" when confessing sins and praying on behalf of his people. In his prayer (vv. 4-19), there are nearly 50 references to we/us/our or Israel/Jerusalem. Faith in God isn't just an iSpirituality thing, it's shared, it's a "we/us/our" thing.

Jesus makes this clear. Real spirituality isn't a private matter, it's public. ***"What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs...Whoever acknowledges me (publicly confesses) before me, I will also acknowledge (publicly confess) him before my Father in heaven."*** (Matthew 10:27,32) How about Jesus after Peter's magnificent confession, ***"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," he said, "Blessed are you...for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven...and I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock (of your confession) I will build my church."*** The word for church in the original Greek language means "gathering/assembly/collection of people." Jesus didn't mercifully give us grace to set up our own iSpirituality kingdom, but to faith and life together with others. After Pentecost, the

apostles not only said this, they lived it: ***“We cannot help speaking about what we’ve seen and heard.”*** (Acts 4:20) They confessed publicly. They shared publicly. They did it together.

Real spirituality means a real relationship with God, not through my efforts, but through Jesus Christ. Less focus on self and my thoughts and my feelings. More focus on God and his external, powerful Word. Purge, daily, arrogance and pride. Cultivate, daily, humility and repentance. And lose the individuality. For your digital life iPad, iPhone, iAnything are fine. But true spirituality has a “we” factor. We share, we praise, we worship, we confess...together.

Spiritual but not religious. SBNR. Don’t buy the lie. Satan’s selling the same lie he’s always told. He’s prettied it up with some fancy dress, sophistication, and lipstick. But look closely: it’s still lipstick on a pig, an oinking, stinking pig of pride, selfishness and self-worship. You and I know better and have received so much, by grace. Our God deserves our best, real spirituality, in return.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen Luchterhand". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and "L".

Pastor Stephen Luchterhand  
Minocqua, WI