

## How are you?

“How are you?” We understand that this question refers to one’s physical health. It is commonly used in greetings and may be the most frequently asked question worldwide. It is considered perfectly polite to ask about someone’s physical health. Not asking may seem impolite and even uncaring. But it is a personal question. Yet we seldom or never ask about someone’s spiritual health. That seems too personal, too intimate. It may be considered insulting or offensive even to imply that someone might be in less than perfect spiritual condition.

It is a sign of concern to ask about someone’s physical health. Why is asking about someone’s spiritual condition considered prying or judging? We go straight to physical health in any conversation. We get to spiritual topics in the most roundabout way, if at all. Even a pastor, whose work is to care for people spiritually, senses that he must first ask people about their physical well-being and get around to spiritual matters gradually and indirectly.

We ask about the body but not about the soul. We ask about disease but not about sin. We ask about physical pain but not about spiritual distress. We ask about the battle with bacteria but not about the struggle with Satan.

It is a prominent part of pride that politeness almost requires us to assume that everyone must be doing fine spiritually. Sinful pride wants to say, “I am such a good person that you should automatically recognise that I am doing fine in my spirit. And what business is it of yours anyway? How dare you even imply by a question that I might be having spiritual difficulties?”

Satan also has a hand in this business. He is the number one enemy of God and man. He has been known to make frontal assaults, but his primary method is the sneak attack. He wants to lull us into a false sense of security by denying his spiritual reality and our spiritual problems. Genuine security is never attained by denying the enemy’s reality, power, or ferocity. We should want to know what he is all about and what he is up to.

It is just as caring, loving, and more important to ask about someone’s spiritual condition than to ask about his physical health. It does not imply that we consider him a worse sinner than others or ourselves. There need be no arrogance expressed or perceived in such a question. Christians should try to show love and concern by asking about spiritual life, whether it is present or flourishing.

Christians should know that they themselves have problems with sin, temptation, and affliction. Everyone in this world has those problems. Christians are not spiritually perfect. They are still sinners in this life and face spiritual difficulties of many kinds.

Christians should also know that non-Christians have nothing but spiritual problems. Without Christ, they have no solution to those problems. The assumption that people who do not confess faith in Christ are in good shape spiritually is a serious mistake. It is the false idea that a person can do fine on his own or have a good relationship with God apart from the Word of God and the faith in Christ that it produces. There is no spiritual life apart from Christ.

A congregation accepting any person as a communicant without asking about his spiritual condition is considered warm and friendly. That is actually an uncaring attitude! A congregation asking first about an individual’s spiritual state, whether he confesses his sin and faith in God’s grace for Jesus’ sake, is considered judgmental. That is actually the caring, loving attitude!

The spiritual diagnosis for all of us is God’s Law, which tells us that we are sinners and warns of God’s anger against sin. The solution to the problem, the cure for those who admit the disease, the way from death to life, is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the good news that the Son of God became a Man to satisfy God’s anger against our sin by keeping the laws we have broken and by suffering the punishment for our sins, dying on the cross for our guilt.

There is no sense talking about the solution if we do not discuss the problem. No one cares about a cure unless he is concerned about a disease. It should be considered extremely loving to ask about someone’s spiritual condition as long as the questioner admits his sinfulness and is motivated to share the message of forgiveness for Jesus’ sake. That good news is how God gives spiritual life, health, and growth.

You will soon ask or be asked the question: “How are you?” When you hear or say it, think about a spiritual dimension to the question in your life and the other person’s life. Think about sin as the problem. Think about forgiveness for Jesus’ sake as the solution.