

# Adventuring with God

Jeanne Hedrick

September 2009

---

## Staying Clean

If most of us were honest, we'd rank going to the dentist almost dead last on our list of preferred activities. Oh sure, we'd be quick to admit that it's important and helpful to us. And if we're smart, and have dental insurance, we make the effort to go on a regular basis. But we're seldom tempted to fit in some extra trips before our six-month visit is due. Most of us approach our designated day with either dread or a sullen acceptance. Even the relatively painless cleaning process couldn't be described as fun. It's just something we do because we know we should.

It's when we're *leaving* the dentist's office that we can appreciate what we've just done—our teeth feel cleaner and look brighter, and we know from the expert (the dentist who has gone to school for years to be able to give us this kind of information) what is or isn't lurking below the surface. It's an enormous relief when we hear we are okay... we don't have to worry about any major restorative work in the near future. Even if there *is* a problem, it's nice to be able to fix it before it gets any worse. These are the payoffs of going to the dentist on a regular basis.

I suspect most of us would approach the prospect of a spiritual checkup in much the same way. But if we're serious about maintaining a good relationship with our Father, we need to see what a valuable resource it is. The man after God's own heart, King David, invited God's scrutiny and welcomed His intervention so he could be cleansed from sin's power.

*"Who can discern his errors?"* he asks rhetorically, then prays, *"Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over*

*me"* (Psalm 19:12-13). In verse 14 we see the motivation for his prayer: *"May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer"* (Psalm 19:14).

Keeping ourselves clean spiritually is both a daily and a once-in-a-while process. With our teeth, we do quite a bit ourselves through daily maintenance: We brush, we floss, and we (hopefully) avoid the foods and drinks that promote tooth decay. In the same way, we can use the spiritual resources God has given us—praying, reading His Word, and obeying the leading of His Spirit—to cut down on sin in our lives. These are daily disciplines that really do help us to abide in Christ. Avoiding the thoughts and activities that turn us away from a godly lifestyle helps us too. John Donne wrote, "Sleep with clean hands either kept clean all day by integrity or washed clean at night by repentance."

Sometimes, though, we need more than we can do ourselves. We need the help of someone else—someone who can find the problem areas we may not be aware of or can't quite reach to clean. That's where regular spiritual checkups come in. In the busyness of our daily lives it's easy to let things slide, and sometimes we aren't even aware of a potential problem lurking below the surface of our spiritual consciousness. We call these blind spots—areas that are just outside of our conscious recognition. We know what blind spots can cause when we're driving, so we take the time to turn our neck and look more carefully before merging into another lane. Blind spots in our souls (what David called hidden faults) can

cause unfortunate consequences as well, because we don't see them coming.

I vividly remember the first (and thankfully only) root canal I ever got. I had ignored the subtle cues coming from my tooth for months, figuring it wasn't any big deal, but eventually I had no choice: I had to solicit the help of an expert. By that time, infection had set in, making it harder for the painkillers injected into my gum to work. After several tearful trips to the dentist's office for what could have been a relatively easy problem to fix, I realized how foolish I had been. My hidden problem had started out small, but it had developed into something causing considerable pain and expense.

God's intention for us is that we seek His help early and regularly. Finding and rooting out things that may cause significant problems later on is the Holy Spirit's specialty. Jesus told us that the Spirit would do the deep cleaning work that we can't do on our own. *"The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you"* (John 14:26). If we are responsive to His leading, He will alert us when we start down the wrong road and give us power over the temptation to sin.

It's easy to ignore His subtle cues, like I did the occasional pang that my tooth sent out before becoming infected. That's why we need to set aside *regular times* for spiritual checkups and renewal, cultivating the ability to hear and respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Here's where our motivations get severely tested. How serious are we to please God in body, soul, and spirit? Is this goal more important than all the other stuff in our lives?

A trip to the dentist once every six months doesn't seem like very much. Surely we can manage that! Yet, how often do we put it off and make excuses for not scheduling the appointment? Scheduling spiritual checkups, times when we can focus on God and our relationship with Him alone, may not be something we've even considered. But those who do them testify to huge spiritual dividends. They walk away from them feeling cleaner and brighter, with a peace "that passes all understanding," as Jesus promised.

The times and places for such encounters are personal choices. We might choose to set aside a special day every few months for prayer and fasting. Some of us might enjoy booking a weekend away at a retreat center where we can spend uninterrupted time alone with the Lord. Or we could opt for a regularly scheduled time at home every week, when we have no other agenda but to seek God's face. (This last option requires real discipline since we are surrounded by lots of distractions, but it can be done if we ask for His help and persevere.)

However we carve it out, the goal of these spiritual checkups is to align our hearts to the Father's desires and to strengthen our relationship with Jesus with the help of the Holy Spirit. The process may seem clumsy and time-consuming at first, but we'll soon feel the difference it makes. Clean Christians have a greater power as they serve God and know the joy of obedient living. David wrote that *"Light is shed upon the righteous and joy on the upright in heart"* (Psalm 97:11). Unlike our dental checkups, alone time with God is enjoyable and refreshing, even if the process involves tears and deep soul searching.

As He brings our hidden faults and willful sins to light, God's only desire is for us to agree with Him—to see the problems for what they are and invite Him to wash us clean. He promises in 1 John 1:9, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."*

Thankfully, walking in obedience to His Word and responding to the promptings of the Holy Spirit on a daily basis will cut down on the time required for soul cleaning. Then we can spend our time alone with God praising Him and rejoicing in our ongoing relationship. Like going to get our teeth cleaned and receiving an "all's well" report from the dentist, spiritual checkups can bring relief and a deep sense of satisfaction. As Peter urged in Acts 3:19, *"Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord."*

This is not a one-time, only-at-conversion experience. We can be refreshed over and over again as we humble ourselves before our Father and seek His cleansing.

Andrew Murray wrote, “As sinful beings, we have been subject to the desires of the human nature and the world. We have been brought under the power of the visible and temporal. We need time alone with God. ... Let it be the one thing you set your heart upon: to seek, find, and meet with God.”

Whenever we begin to feel a little “dinghy” and our daily disciplines don’t seem to be achieving the degree of spiritual cleanliness that we long for, it’s time to book a checkup with the expert hygienist, the triune God, and let Him thoroughly examine us and wash us clean from every stain of sin. What an awesome privilege this is for His children!

---

“Down at the cross where my Saviour died, down where for cleansing from sin I cried,  
There to my heart was the blood applied; glory to His name.

I am so wondrously saved from sin, Jesus so sweetly abides within.  
There at the cross where He took me in; glory to His name.

Oh, precious fountain that saves from sin, I am so glad I have entered in;  
There Jesus saves me and keeps me clean; glory to His name.”

Elisha A. Hoffman, 1878