

Probe Your Soul with Questions

George Whitefield (1714–1770) was “the best-known evangelist of the eighteenth century and one of the greatest itinerant preachers in the history of Protestantism.”¹ Before he retired each night, he opened his journal and probed his soul with questions such as these he’d placed in the flyleaf:

Have I,

1. Been fervent in prayer?
2. After or before every deliberate conversation or action, considered how it might tend to God’s glory?
3. After any pleasure, immediately given thanks?
4. Planned business for the day?
5. Been simple and recollected in everything?
6. Been meek, cheerful, affable in everything I said or did?
7. Been proud, vain, unchaste, or enviable of others?
8. Recollected in eating and drinking? Thankful? Temperate in sleep?
9. Thought or spoken unkindly of anyone?
10. Confessed all sins?²

A more famous contemporary of Whitefield’s, Jonathan Edwards, compiled a list of resolutions that is still widely circulated. Posted in his journal for frequent review, they were his lifelong spiritual goals and priorities. What isn’t as well-known about these resolutions is that Edwards regularly evaluated himself against them and recorded the results in his journal.³

Due in no small part to these continual, soul-searching inquiries, Whitefield and Edwards became increasingly conformed to Christlikeness in life and character.

While I heartily recommend this practice of Whitefield and Edwards (and of countless others throughout church history), there are other ways to use questions like these. For instance, in addition to your individual spirituality you could also ask yourself specifically about your marriage and family life, work, Internet habits, financial stewardship, or any other area of life where frequent reminders to obedience would help. Several years ago, I used a similar method to remind myself not only of previous commitments, but to cultivate some new habits as well. If you develop a long list of questions, you might review a small number daily rather than the entire list.

The Bible directs each of us to “examine himself” before taking the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:28). Similarly, 2 Corinthians 13:5 instructs us, “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves.” Using an established series of soul-probing questions can simplify the ongoing process of obedience to such commands, and make it easier for us to keep short accounts with God.

¹ M.A. Noll, “George Whitefield,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Second Edition, Walter A. Elwell, ed., (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2001), p. 1273

² Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-Century Revival* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1979), vol. 1, p. 80.

³ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, rev. Edward Hickman (1834; reprint, Edinburgh, Scotland: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), vol. 1, p. xxiv.

Excerpted from Donald S. Whitney, *Simplify Your Spiritual Life* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 2003).

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