

Discovering Your Spiritual Strengths

By Allison Blankemeyer

It is often said that God speaks to us in a “*still small voice*.” In February of 2014 I went to Parish Health Ministry’s Refresh Your Soul Conference to hear Dr. Eben Alexander, author of the book *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife*. The second speaker was a gentleman by the name of Dr. Richard Johnson. I was not familiar with his work and had not planned to stay for his presentation due to the fact that my husband, who had early onset Alzheimer’s, was home with a new caregiver. I wasn’t comfortable being gone for the whole morning. Yet something “within” told me I needed to hear what Dr. Johnson had to say. I’m so grateful that I listened to that “still small voice,” because what I heard in the next hour changed my life.

Ever since I can remember I have been perplexed by the reoccurring experience of feeling “separated from myself,” and at the same time feeling a disconnection with God, who I normally feel very close to. Listening to Dr. Johnson talk that morning about his decades of research and his development of the Spiritual Strengths model, I couldn’t help but think it held answers to some of my most perplexing questions. Essentially, what he explained was that each of us has six fundamental Spiritual Strengths, along with six corresponding shadows and compulsions. Our strengths are gifts we are born with and are as unique to us as our fingerprints. Incorporated into our personality, whether we are aware of it or not, is a Spiritual Strength for our believing, perceiving, thinking, feeling, deciding and acting functions. Together they serve as our pathway to peace and wellness. When we tap into them we are our most authentic, true selves – basically who God intended us to be.

I cared for my husband, Doug, in our home for seven years. The time was approaching when I knew I would have to move him to a special facility. I had never faced such a heart wrenching decision in my life. I had prayed for the strength to get through the unavoidable pain, but kept coming up short. Listening to Dr. Johnson that February morning and reading his books in the weeks ahead, I found hope again. I learned that I could not only survive this experience, but that I would discover healing in the process. How? Critical to being able to rely on our strengths to carry us through our most demanding challenges, I learned from Dr. Johnson an understanding of how shadows and compulsions can come into play and how they threaten our wellbeing and effectiveness.

Shadows, Dr. Johnson explained, are the “*reverse image of our strength... it is a ‘place’ in our personality where our spiritual strength is absent... While our spiritual strengths are all spiritual energy, Universal Love in action, our shadows are all vices, or fear in reaction.*” Compulsions on the other hand “*result when we attempt to use our strengths in inappropriate ways, when we exaggerate our spiritual strengths and contort them into forces that actually work against us.*” I recognized immediately how both my shadows and compulsions were affecting me and how the simple act of recognizing them for what they were, helped reduce significantly the power they had over me. More importantly, I learned that being mindful of them helped me use them as cues to return to my position of spiritual strength.

While the last three years of Doug's life were among the most difficult and painful, they were simultaneously the most beautiful and rewarding. I was given the resources I needed, time and time again, to heal from the agony of losing him and enter that space where there is only Grace.

My experience studying Dr. Johnson's work and using his materials, gave me tremendous insight into my personal struggles and the ability to understand the obstacles I had been unable to overcome in spite of years of prayer, reading and counseling. What I gained was a growing sense of peace that helped me immensely as I continued to walk the path of Alzheimer's with both my husband and mother.

After immersing myself in my own Spiritual Strengths study for over a year, I facilitated my first group in the spring of 2015 and have continued to work with small groups, as well as one on one, for those interested in deepening their spiritual lives. The feedback I have received has been overwhelmingly positive. It has become my passion and privilege to share this work with others. While I do not charge for my time, I consider it my gift. The materials, which include the assessment and two books, cost \$55.00. The study is a seven week commitment of an hour and a half each week. I generally offer both afternoon and evening study groups.

Anyone interested in learning more about participating in a study group and/or signing up for a fall session, please contact Allison at azb@fuse.net.

“When you're accurately expressing your genuine giftedness, your authentic you, you not only feel better, work better, love better, relate better, like yourself better, play better and communicate better, beyond all of this, you'll actually be better, because you are more you. You will have found healing.”

Discover Your Spiritual Strengths, Dr. Richard Johnson