

We want to know how we are doing in all sorts of ways. Heart health, lung capacity, finances, personal development . . . You name it, there's a self-test for it.

Blood pressure? You can (and probably should) check your blood pressure regularly without waiting for that annual medical appointment. You can use one of those at-home devices or stop by the drugstore that offers free screening. And you can monitor your glucose level. You need to know the normal ranges for blood pressure and glucose so you can compare yours with the acceptable ranges, of course.

Self-tests are available not only to help us track certain aspects of our health but also to prepare us for events like financial shifts or occupational or academic tests. If you want to determine the health of your personality, you can choose from a wide variety of psychological self-tests. Each test asks a number of questions about how you respond to certain situations. All you have to do is check the appropriate response boxes. (Of course, if you aren't aware of how you respond in those situations, you can ask your spouse or a brave friend to tell you how to answer certain questions.)

What about how we test and measure others? What measurements do we rely on then? And how reliable are our measurements? Do we measure the shortcomings of others but fail to see our own shortcomings?

EVALUATING HOW OTHERS MEASURE UP

While Phil and Maggie Quigley were having Sunday dinner, they passed judgment on their church's morning service. Phil criticized the preacher: "He preached far too long again. And he needs to control his appetite. Have you noticed how his belly flops over his belt?" Just then, the top button of Phil's trousers popped.

"You're right," Maggie responded as she plopped a couple of plates down in a kitchen overflowing with a week's worth of stacked dishes. "And I could have screamed when Helen sang 'How Great Thou Art.' Her voice sounded like a tornado warning siren. I don't think she has any business singing solos. She hosted the Thursday women's Bible study, and let me tell you, her house was a mess. She needs to clean house if she expects to be a blessing to others."

Phil scowled. “Church seems to be getting worse all the time.”

Reaching for a dinner roll, ten-year-old Kevin spoke up. “Well, if you ask me, I think it was a pretty good show for a dollar!”

GOD’S DIRECTIVE TO TEST OURSELVES

It’s easy to overlook our own faults but hard to overlook others’ faults, isn’t it? Perhaps that’s why Jesus emphasized the need to extract the piece of timber in our own eyes when attempting to remove a speck of sawdust from someone else’s eye (Matthew 7:3–5). The apostle James agreed with this warning. If we presume to teach others how to live, we should recognize that “in many things we offend all” (James 3:2).

The apostle Paul urged the believers who lived in Rome to respect fellow believers whose attitude about matters of preference differed from theirs. “Every one of us shall give an account of himself to God,” he pointed out (Romans 14:12). Each of us has such a big responsibility to keep close accounts with God about our own choices and actions that we cannot take over those responsibilities for others.

At times, as a pastor, I have added the work of judging others to the work of the ministry. I have thought poorly of someone who was absent from church for a few Sundays; I assumed he was unspiritual. I learned later, however, that he was too ill to attend. My attitude was harsh, judgmental, and unfounded. I should have tested myself against the standard of God’s unconditional love.

My wife often quotes the first part of Hebrews 10:36 to me. “Ye have need of patience,” the verse states. She is right. I often lack patience with people and circumstances. If I were to test myself and apply the truth given in Hebrews 10:36, I would be kinder and less demanding.

The apostle James described the tongue as “an unruly evil, full of deadly poison” (James 3:8). Instead of engaging the tongue while our emotions are running high, we should apply a self-test: Will our words hurt, or help? Will they excoriate, or edify?

A church leader shocked a finance committee when he and his wife expressed separate opinions about a budgetary matter. Usually quiet and cooperative, the leader’s face became beet

red. He shouted at his wife to shut up and waved his fists at her. If only he had applied the Bible's self-test about his tongue he could have restrained his tongue. Instead, he lost the respect of the committee members.

Pressures and cares from work and weariness may tempt us into venting our tensions through harsh words, as a former Bible college president discovered. He and his wife were driving home at the end of a very busy Sunday, when he spoke harshly to her. To his credit, he apologized. "I'm sorry, dear," he said, "but I preached twice this morning, once this afternoon, and again this evening, and I am just plain tired."

"Yes, I know you are tired from all that preaching. But I had to listen to you preach twice this morning, once this afternoon, and again this evening. And, dear, I'm tired too."

If he had applied James's teaching to himself, the Bible college president might have remembered his responsibility to keep his tongue in check.

TESTING OURSELVES ACCORDING TO GOD'S STANDARDS

You and I wouldn't commit crimes, would we? It would be shameful to violate the law. It is every bit as shameful to violate God's law of love. So we ought to examine our words and deeds often to see whether they comply with that law of God and reflect the fruit of the Holy Spirit at work in us (Matthew 22:37-40; 1 Corinthians 13; Galatians 5:22, 23; 6:1, 2; Ephesians 5:2; 1 Peter 1:22).

Thankfully, the Holy Spirit is always ready to come alongside us to convict us when we fail and to guide us in the path of righteousness. His goal is to cultivate Christlikeness in us. By applying self-tests from the Scriptures and making Psalm 139:23 and 24 a constant prayer, we cooperate with Him. "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23, 24). ■

Jim Dyet and his wife, Gloria, live in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Horizons published his article "Another Way of Seeing" in its May 4, 2014, issue.

