

## LifeShapes – the Heptagon

(from <http://passionfruitblog.wordpress.com/2009/10/21/lifeshapes-the-heptagon/>)

### Practicing the Principles of a Vital Life

Biology has taught us there are seven characteristics that identify all living organisms (the mnemonic is MRS GREN). Each one applies to physical life but also to spiritual life and growth, and we can use them to assess the vitality of our spiritual life. Jesus used illustrations from natural life an awful lot to make points about spiritual life (trees, seeds, birds, vines, ...). This similiarity between physical and spiritual life makes sense of course, as we are physical and spiritual beings designed by the Author of Life! These principles apply to our individual lives but also to the life of the church body (...there's that 'organic' metaphor again!).

**Movement:** a response to a stimulus, whether external (danger, heat) or internal (hunger, pain). The Old Testament is full of the people of God on the move (Abraham onwards) . God uses many ways to stimulate His people to move on: His Word, His Spirit, persecution. When we feel the stimulus, do we move?

**Respiration:** need healthy breathing pattern so that oxygen is released into the body to let it function properly. God coming to us is described in the Bible as his breath. To breathe in God by his Spirit is prayer – no need to suffocate or hyperventilate but to have a regular pattern that is second nature.

**Sensitivity:** The body is a unit working together: sensitivity plays a vital role in our receptiveness to stimuli. Are we sensitive to God's stimuli in our lives (reflection, soft hearts, humility). How about the church body – depending on our ministry, are we helping the community be sensitive to the pains of others (pastor); sensitive to foresight given by God (prophets); sensitive to the needs of others in hearing, listening, instructing (teachers); sensitive in speech and sharing the good news (evangelists); sensitive to staleness and when to move out into new areas (apostles).

**Growth:** growth is the result of a healthy life. If the church stops growing it will die; no growth is a sign of decay and death. Remember the lesson of the semi-circle, to prune branches to cause more growth.

**Reproduction:** the multiplication of an organism. One Christian became two. Also the passing on of the faith to the next generation. Are we investing in those younger than us and building their faith?

**Excretion:** every heart builds up a collection of junk throughout the day that needs to be emptied through the process of repentance and discipline. This junk is primarily sinful attitudes and behaviours, and their results (e.g. bitterness springing from unforgiveness). If we don't, it is the same as a body not ridding itself of waste it has accumulated; it will bring discomfort, disease and eventually death. The toxins are called the root of bitterness, according to the writer of Hebrews (12:15), and we need to remember that God's grace can clean us. Sometimes the church must expel an unrepentant brother; giving the opportunity to come back into the faith and the fellowship.

**Nutrition:** Living things must take in nutrients or they will die. Jesus is the bread of life, so to live we must dine on His words. Jesus said that His food was to do the will of the Father (John 4). So obedience to the Word is important for our nutrition and health.

Movement – action in response to external or internal promptings by God

Respiration – steady rhythm of two-way prayer

Sensitivity – ability to hear what God is saying to us

Growth – a natural result of the other things functioning well

Reproduction – passing on our faith, to others and to the next generation

Excretion – repentance of sin, dealing with unforgiveness

Nutrition – doing the will of the Father and feeding on the Word

The heptagon (MRS GREN) makes a great tool of examen / self-examination: a simple way to assess the vitality of your Christian life. Undertaking this review might lead to a Kairos moment that sets you off on the circle of learning once again

