

## **What Does It Mean To Be A Spiritual Person?**

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God's Empowering Presence

1 Corinthians 12

This morning I am going to be continuing in a series that I have been doing on the Holy Spirit, a series that I have been teaching on for about three months now. I have called it "God's Empowering Presence." We are pushing forward this morning in understanding the work of the Holy Spirit by tackling the subject of spirituality. You ought to be aware of the fact that if you look at a bookstore or at recent movies themes, one of the rapidly developing trends in the United States and certainly in the entire western world is the explosion of non-Christian forms of spirituality. You see it in the celebration of Islam, in the million man march. Many of the T-shirts in the million man march have the Islamic symbols on them of the crescent moon and the stars. There is an explosion of non-Christian spirituality infiltrating many segments of American society right now.

Just to give you a couple of statistics, before WWII there were just a few mosques in the United States. In the entire country there were just a few mosques, now there are almost a 1000 with many more being built each year. There are more Muslims in this country now than Episcopalians by far. There are several hundred thousand practicing Hindus in this country and many more practicing Buddhists.

Certainly, if all that we were contending with in terms of establishing Christian spirituality was traditional non-Christian religions, we would have our hands full. But it is clear that the leading edge of non-Christian spirituality is not coming from the growth of traditional non-Christian religions, but from New Age spirituality. A recent gallop poll said that over 30% of Americans believe in reincarnation as the explanation for what happens after you die.

Now, reincarnation is an utterly unbiblical viewpoint of what happens after you die. The Bible teaches in Hebrews 9:27 that we only die once and then comes judgment—either unto eternal life or unto eternal condemnation. But over 30% of Americans say that they believe you die many times and don't face judgment, but rather come back in a different body.

Two major writers in the field of psychology and death studies, Elizabeth Kubler Ross and Carl Rogers, both speak very openly about their own contacts with a variety of spirits, their own participation in séances, and conjuring up spirits being used to channel spirits.

I could multiply the examples by the hundred-fold in terms of the books out that reflect a non-biblical view of angels. In mainline Protestant churches it has become very popular to worship female goddesses. Perhaps you've heard about the worship of Sophia in the Presbyterian Church; it is an utterly unbiblical development.

Now you may ask why this is happening. I think it can be explained in part by noting two developments. I think that what we are living through is the end of an age, the end of an era. The modern age is now drawing to a close. The

modern age celebrated technology, science, reason, and rationality, as the answer for all of life's problems. The modern age believed if we could only get more technologically advanced, more educated, and more objective, then we would solve the human dilemma of war and crime and violence and racism. What we have discovered, of course, is that in the most technologically advanced century in history, the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we have had more war and more violence and more ethnic conflict and more racism and more strife than in any other century. The modern age has left most Americans dissatisfied. Science and technology and advances in the speed of running computer programs simply do not provide the depth of meaning and purpose that human beings crave in their souls.

One of the reasons why so many Americans are opting for non-biblical, spiritual answers is because we have lost the modern age's confidence in science and technology's ability to provide us with the answers to the deeper questions of life. Maybe science can help us to do things faster, but it won't tell us why we should do the thing in the first place. Science can't answer purpose questions or meaning questions or values questions. And so many people are saying that some spirituality of any kind is better than the modern age's rejection of all spirituality.

I think a second reason why we are seeing such an explosion of non-Christian spirituality is because the church in America for so many years has been so hollow and so devoid of the offer of spiritual experience. You know, when the average person comes knocking on the church's door and says, "I am looking for something to fill my soul up with" (they might not use that language, but that is what is going on) "I feel this emptiness inside; I feel lonely and disconnected from God. I feel like I don't know what life is about and that I am living just on the surface. Is there any deeper answers or deeper meaning?"

What they often get back from many churches is a reflection of the culture's own confusion. People hear hesitant voices and tentative proposals about politics and about the current budget battle. They come to a church and all they get is a reflection of what they might see on any right or left wing political program, but no spiritual answers. No spiritual experiences.

I have been teaching on the Holy Spirit these last few months, friends, because in part I think that spirituality is the issue of the 90's in the same way that politics was the issue in the 60's and consumerism was the issue in the 70's and big business and management was the issue in the 80's. I think spirituality is the issue of the 90's. Most people in our country, at this very moment, are looking for deeper answers. Most of the people that you meet have a feeling that their lives are spinning out of control and they want something to anchor their children and anchor their families and provide some kind of direction from our country. They are not getting it, friends, from politics, the President or from Congress. Politics is totally gridlocked; the government is shutting down. If we don't deal with spirituality and spiritual experience in the Christian church, people will look elsewhere, to non-Christian spiritual answers.

Now, I want you to turn with me to 1 Corinthians 12 where Paul writes,

"Now about spiritual gifts, brothers [and sisters], I do not want you to be ignorant."

The word “gift” by the way is added in the English because 1 Corinthians 12-14 are about spiritual gifts, but literally Paul writes in the original, “Now about the spirituals (or we would say spirituality), I don’t want you to be ignorant.” See, we need to set 1 Corinthians 12-14 in its context in the letter of 1 Corinthians. We could say that really the entire letter to the Corinthians is about what it means to be spiritual. It is an incredibly relevant letter at a time in our own history when people are racing off in a million different directions looking for spirituality. 1 Corinthians is a letter about what it means to be a spiritual person.

Paul tells the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 1 that he rejoices with them because of the grace that has been given them and that they have been enriched in every way in speaking and in knowledge, that they don’t lack any spiritual gift. The Corinthian church is a church that is filled with all kinds of spiritual gifts. They are seeing healings, they speak in tongues, and they are witnessing manifestations. People in the church are prophesying. The Corinthian church was a full blown charismatic church. Nevertheless, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3, “You are not very spiritual.” And he tells them that he couldn’t address them as spiritual people even though they had all the spiritual gifts operative.

The Corinthian church was a church that thought spirituality was a matter of the number of experiences that you had, the number of spiritual gifts that you exercised, and whether you spoke in tongues or not. They had gotten to this place in the Christian life that they were so spiritual that they no longer had to concern themselves with people who were in sin (1 Corinthians 5). They were so spiritual that they didn’t have to worry about what they did with their sexuality (1 Corinthians 6). They were so spiritual that it didn’t matter that they were bringing law suits against each other, which by the way is one of the most significant sins in the Christian church today. Christians regularly violate 1 Corinthians 6 by bringing law suits against other Christians. I would encourage you businessmen and women, before you file a law suite against a brother or sister in Christ, read 1 Corinthians 6 a dozen times and tell God why it doesn’t apply to your life.

But these people were so spiritual that they thought they didn’t even look forward to being physically resurrected (1 Corinthians 15). They were beyond all of this stuff. So Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 really tightens things down in his teaching on the Holy Spirit and he says: Brothers and sisters, I want to explain to you what it means to be a spiritual person. What Christian spirituality is all about because you have this idea that you get beyond the mundane of whether you bring lawsuits, and you are beyond the mundane matter of sexuality and beyond what you do with your body. You are even beyond needing to be raised from the dead. I need to explain spirituality to you again.

That is what today’s talk is about. I called it “What Does It Mean to be a Spiritual Person?” Let’s pray.

Paul says, “Now about the spirituals, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be ignorant. You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other, you were influenced and led astray to dumb idols. Therefore, I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus be cursed,’ and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.”

Now, Paul contrasts their lives before they came to Christ with their lives after. He says: When you were a non-Christian, when you were pagans, you were led away or carried off by different spiritual impulses.

What does it mean to be a spiritual person? Well, negatively, it is not about the number of your spiritual experiences. You know, having mountain top experiences is not the mark of a spiritual person. You can come to church here in the Vineyard and have a wonderful experience during the service of God's grace and power in your life; you could listen to the message that I offer and it could really connect with you on a given morning. You could feel that God is, in fact, speaking to you in the message, that he is addressing something in your life, you could feel personally spoken to; you could be moved by the worship and lift your hands up really high as you are focusing your attention on Christ; you could come forward at the end of the message for prayer and have an incredible feeling of God's presence and then you could walk out of here, get in the car and in five minutes lose everything that you have gained and be angry and gossip about someone in the service. Have you ever watched yourself go from the pinnacle to the pit in ten steps? You are out the door of the building and you have gone from the pinnacle to the pit. Ever lived that one?

Friends, spirituality is not a matter of how high you can jump, it is how straight you can walk when you hit the ground. Paul does not measure the spirituality of a church by what happens in its meetings. See, we can have great meetings and we have people coming in here who generally say, "Man, you have a great meeting." Some people feel that we don't have great enough meetings and they go to other places for even greater meetings. But you can't measure the spirituality of a church just by what happens at its meetings. It is what happens outside the meeting in people's day to day lives. And the real test of spirituality is: do you respect the lordship of Christ when you are outside the meeting?

Now don't get me wrong. I love it when you get touched by God, especially when you feel for the first time God's presence, when you experience His love, when you know that God is real because He's touched you. But spirituality is not a series of mountaintop experiences. Spirituality is a matter of day to day living under the lordship of Christ.

Paul says, "No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Spirit of God." And he is not just talking about saying it. He is talking about confessing it. That means to agree with your heart and to announce what you are saying with your mouth. No one can live under the lordship of Christ except by the Spirit of God.

Do you want to test whether or not you are a spiritual person? Look at what you are like outside the meeting. Do you respect, do you respond to the Lordship of Jesus Christ? When you have that inner sense that you need to shut off something that you are watching because Jesus doesn't want you to watch that; or you need to stop talking about a person or a subject because Jesus doesn't want you to say that; or you need to ask someone's forgiveness for doing something wrong because Jesus wants you to ask their forgiveness. A spiritual person respects that lordship of Christ. They submit to Jesus as their master. Jesus gets to be the signal caller of a spiritual person's decisions.

Understand, friends, you cannot be a spiritual person and take the attitude, "Well, I really don't care what the Bible or what Jesus thinks about

divorce or homosexuality or forgiveness of my parents or this person who abused me. I don't care what Jesus thinks or what the Bible teaches because I feel..." Spiritual people always care what the Bible says because it has the authority of God's direction in their lives.

Spiritual people say, "This particular Bible text cuts counter to what I want. It cuts counter to my desires. I want to buy something now and go further into debt, but the Bible says piling up debt is stupid, that debt enslaves people. Jesus is my Lord. He is my Master so I am going to bow my knee to Jesus and obey this text and trust that God will work my end out for good because he loves me."

See, the issue for a spiritual person is what or who guides our decisions. What you are willing to do in your business; who you are willing to date; what you choose to do with your money. Spiritual people submit their choices to Jesus. Jesus will guide a spiritual person's decisions. His Spirit directs our choices.

In fact, the two words that are most incompatible are "no" and "Lord." We can't say, "No, Lord." That doesn't make any sense. To say "Lord" is to say, "Yes, Lord." It actually feels good. You try that. "Yes, Lord." Especially when you are making a tough decision, "yes, Lord."

Spiritual people also reflect the unity and diversity of the Trinity. Verse 4: "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of workings, but the same God works in all of them."

Notice that Paul in a fairly unselfconscious way talks about the Trinity. In verse 4 he speaks about the Spirit. He is talking about the Holy Spirit. In verse 5 he is talking about the Lord which for him is always the Lord Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, God the Son. Then in verse 6, he speaks about God, which typically for Paul means God the Father. Verse 6 is talking about God the Father, verse 5 is talking about the Lord Jesus Christ and verse 4 is talking about the Holy Spirit. He is saying that spiritual people reflect the Trinity in their relationships and in their activities.

Do you understand that for Paul, the fundamental reality of the universe is the Triune God? Life is designed to reflect this wonderful, loving relationship in the Trinity that existed before God made anything at all. You see, life is to be patterned on God. When you are building a house, you use blueprints in order that all of the lines of the house are straight and all the boards fit together properly. You use blueprints. If you are making a dress, you use a pattern.

What do we use for building our relationships? What is the pattern? What is the blueprint? What is the paradigm, the model?

In Paul's mind the model of ideal relationship is the relationship that exists in the Trinity. What Paul sees in the Trinity is a model of leadership and submission in marriage. He talks about that in 1 Corinthians 11, but he also sees in the Trinity a model for unity and diversity in the church. There is one God and yet he exists in three persons—God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Each of the persons of the Godhead has a differing primary function, one God and yet a diversity of function. The Vineyard church is patterned on the Trinity: one church and yet we are all different; you are not me and I am not you. We are like different colored tiles that God sovereignly arranges into a mosaic to make a picture.

The Holy Spirit is said to give gifts. The Lord is said to provide service. And God the Father is said to be at work or to give workings or energizings to the church. And each of these—gifts, service, workings, describe different ways of thinking about spiritual gifts. The word “gift” is literally “a bit of grace.” The Greek word is “charismata.” It is derived from the Greek word “charis,” which means grace. The reason people who exercise spiritual gifts are called charismatic is because they have received the charismata, these bits of grace. The Spirit of God gives these little bits of grace. Lord Jesus is associated with service because of his servanthood. We find something else about the gifts here. They are for service, not for puffing up, not: “Look at us, we can heal!” No. Spiritual gifts are to reflect Jesus' servant heart.

We find something else about the gifts. They are called workings. They are energizings. I talk with many people who feel run down spiritually. They say they are in ministry, but their batteries are run down. They are weary in well doing. They are involved in a lot of different meetings and lots of different service and lots of different Christian activity, but they are feeling run down. They are tired of trying to juggle so many balls in the air. They feel like they are living to work rather than working to live. I talk with so many people who have all the signs of burn-out: irritability and a growing sense of apathy about everything. You know, churches that don't believe in or exercise spiritual gifts are going to have lots of burned out people.

Paul says one of the functions of spiritual gifts is that God the Father energizes you so that he is working through you and you are not just doing Christian activity in your own strength. It is so important that when you are run down, when you are empty, to go to God the Father and ask him to fill your tank up again so that you have the energy to live the Christian life in the power of God.

I read a story several years ago by a woman who said that all morning long she felt that God wanted to say something to her. She said, “God what is it? What are you trying to get me to do? What is it you are trying to say? What do you want me to do?” Finally she stopped her activity and she turned to God and opened up her hands and she said, “Lord, what is it?” She felt the Lord speak to her heart and say, “Joy, I don't want you to do anything. I want to give you something. I want to give you myself. I want to fill you up because you are empty.” St. Augustine said that God gives us gifts where he finds empty hands. If your hands are filled with packages, with yourself, with activity, with busyness, you can't receive the Father's energizing.

A spiritual person is someone who reflects the Trinity in his/her unity and in his/her diversity. Let's look down to verse 14. I am going to speak out of verses 7-11 next week as we look at particular spiritual gifts. In verse 14 Paul writes,

“Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he

wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.”

We have found that spiritual people are people who respect the Lordship of Christ. Spiritual people are people who reflect the Trinity. And spiritual people in this text are people who reject feelings of inferiority. The key to verses 14-16 is this phrase, “I do not belong” in verse 15, “If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong’” and verse 16, “If the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong.’” Spiritual people are people who have learned how to overcome their feelings of inferiority and their feelings of not belonging in the body of Christ, so they can participate and minister in the church.

You know, friends, one of the major reasons why people who are not Christians don’t go to church is because they have this very strong feeling that they do not fit. They don’t belong. They wouldn’t be accepted.

But I see the same thing with Christian people. That there are many, many people who have made decisions to become followers of Christ, who have accepted Christ into their hearts, but who still say, “You know, I really don’t fit in the church.” And a part of this, I believe, is a self-inflicted wound, this feeling of not fitting, of not belonging. A part of our problem is a self-inflicted wound. Feelings of inferiority are bred from a me-centeredness. Our attention is on ourselves. “I don’t fit. I don’t belong. Whenever I get into myself I feel bad. I see some way I have been slighted. Something another person has said seems unfair.” And you see what the me-centered person does is compare themselves with others. You note the comparisons that are being drawn in verses 15 and 16. Paul is saying, “If the foot is saying, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if an ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong,’ it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body.”

We have two parts of the body comparing themselves with two other parts of the body. And note that it is nothing that anyone else is doing that makes the person feel outside the church. We are talking about self-inflicted wounds. We are talking about that tendency to compare ourselves with someone who is just a little bit different than us and maybe just a little bit ahead of us. Isn’t it interesting that the foot compares itself not with the eye, but the foot compares itself with the hand. And the ear doesn’t compare itself with the hand, but compares itself with the eye.

The point is, friends, that our self-inflicted wounds, a feeling that we don’t belong, are usually the result of me-centeredness and comparing ourselves with people who are like us only they are doing a little bit better. See, counselors will compare themselves with other counselors. And people who are musical will compare themselves with other musicians. People who are musical don’t compare themselves with pastors. Pastors compare themselves with other pastors. And parents compare themselves with other parents. Teenagers compare themselves with teenagers. And so we push ourselves outside the circle by our own comparisons.

Spiritual people are people who have learned to reject, learned to turn a deaf ear to their own feelings of inferiority. Spiritual people are people who say, “I am not going to determine whether or not I fit into the Vineyard based on how I compare with this other individual.”

In fact, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10:12 that every time we compare ourselves with other people in the church, we are being stupid. It is a false standard. You know, I also think that churches can contribute to that feeling of not belonging and that feeling of inferiority by squashing people's uniqueness and requiring that everyone function in exactly the same way. You know, when we try to jam a square peg into a round hole, the square peg gets the message pretty quickly that he or she doesn't fit at all. And so it is in a church where the Holy Spirit isn't given the freedom to determine how people ought to be used.

You know, in some places if you don't have a certain kind of personality or temperament, you are made to feel like you don't fit in the church. Some churches only respect extroverted people or aggressive people. Sometimes if you don't have a certain kind of gift mix because the church values teachers or the church values people who are great at sitting on committees or the church values pure evangelists you are made to feel like you don't belong in the church.

Now, if we just try to shove people into our systems and into our traditions, people are pretty quickly going to get the idea that they don't fit. But when a church allows people the freedom to be themselves, to be unique, when a church creates programs based on the unique gifting and leadings and people's leadership abilities, then folks suddenly take a deep breath and say, "You know, for the first time in my life I feel like I belong somewhere."

That is what Paul is talking about in verse 18. In fact, God has arranged the parts of the body, every one of them just as he wanted them to be. Remember the mosaic – we all fit; we all have a place. When a church allows God to arrange parts of the body, when the church doesn't say to God, "Well, this is where everyone has to fit in," but a church says, "Holy Spirit, you are the divine administrator of the church, we really believe in the headship of Jesus Christ over our church." The practical way we work it out is that we don't do just pure, top-down programming here in the Vineyard. We pastors don't just sit around and say, "What are the needs" and then create programs.

Instead, we try to be responsive to the gifts of people. We try to create programs based on whether or not God has arranged our church by providing us with a leader for a program.

Project Compassion, our ministry to AIDS victims in the community, was not rooted in a decision on the part of our pastors to minister to people with AIDS. There are any number of groups of people in this city who need ministry. Project Compassion was started because Sharon Fryer had the leadership ability to say to the pastors, "Hey, I would like to work with people with AIDS and I would like to form this ministry in the church." The same thing occurred with Fruit of the Vine. There were a few people in the church who said, "I feel like God has given me a burden for the poor and the hungry and I want to start doing some ministry with the hungry and the poor in this city."

Likewise, we are sending a church-planting team to Afghanistan because A. Saperstein has the leadership and the calling to spearhead the team. See, we're talking about a gifts-based church here in Vineyard. The question we ask is what has God given us? How has God arranged our church? Vineyard is unique, like all churches. The question is what is God doing here, not what has He done down the road, what is God doing here?



Now, do you understand that our church gives room for people to express their leadings and their gifts, so long as the people are working in unity with the larger church, they are living moral lives, and they are responsive to the leaders? Do you see how people like you might feel like you belong? How we can all take a deep breath and say, "Wow! I didn't know that church could be like this. That I could fit."

We have other people who felt that God wanted to do something with the children, to do a children's Christmas play, and so we have several people who started that. The reason the Christmas Teas are going so well is because Tammy Sullivan has provided leadership for the Christmas Teas. It is not a matter of what the pastors are doing.

I want to tell you, friends, that if you are interested in starting a ministry and you have decent character and are a member of the church and want to get some help in thinking through your vision and planning, we can help you start a ministry. At the same time, we have dozens and dozens of existing ministries where you can use your gifts. Maybe you are not, at this point in your life, able or interested in starting something, but you want to serve the Lord—that is why we have this ministry fair going.

But there is no better way to feel like you belong than to be used by God in ministry. You say, "I am not just a sitter, an observer, but God is working through me." The last thing we see in this passage is that spiritual people relate to difficult people in the church. Verse 21: "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!' On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it."

Spiritual people reject feelings of inferiority, I don't belong, but spiritual people also reject feelings of superiority, I don't need you. And I was thinking about who it is that we say this to. Who in the church do we say, "I really don't need you"? It is the difficult people, isn't it? It is the people who drain us. The people who rub us the wrong way. The people who offend us. The people who are different than us and we just can't relate to their style, their temperament, their gift mix.

Who do we say, "I don't need you" to in our small groups and really wish that person wasn't here? I really wish I didn't have to associate with them in this ministry. I really wish I didn't have to rub shoulders with such and such a person. I wish they weren't here. Who do we say that to? We say it to the difficult people. Let's throw out those broken tiles from our mosaic. They are useless. They aren't needed in this church.

Let me give you two little lessons about difficult people. Number 1, do you realize that if we got rid of all the difficult people in this church, our building would be absolutely empty? Has it occurred to you that you are someone else's difficult person? There is not one of us that isn't a difficult person to someone else.

Every single one of us is a problem person for another person. When you think of difficult people, make sure you check the box next to your name because I guarantee it, friend, you are someone else's difficult person. You fit the bill exactly. You either talk too much or you talk too little. You have an explosive temper or you are just a people pleaser and a wimp. You are too conservative or you are too impulsive in your decision making. You are too emotional or you are too rationale. You are too stuck up or you are too insecure. You are too something in someone else's eyes.

If we got rid of all the difficult people in this church, the building would be absolutely empty. And we would just shut the lights out and convert the building into a warehouse.

Spiritual people understand that they are someone's difficult person. And spiritual people know they need difficult people around them because the Christian church is meant to be a total miracle. See, when we are talking about the Holy Spirit and what the Holy Spirit does in the church, what we are fundamentally saying is that the church of Jesus Christ is not explainable or meant to be explainable in human terms. All that Paul is talking about in 1 Corinthians 12 is a spiritual understanding of our relationships that requires the Holy Spirit.

Where is the astounding miracle when you and four of your best girlfriends get together for lunch and enjoy each other's company? Most of our relationships are totally understandable in terms of natural affinity. You and three friends, you and four friends, you and your best buddy or girlfriend get together and you enjoy each other because you have similar interests and similar bents and similar values.

Now I am in no way opposed to natural affinity or friendship, we need friends, but there is no miracle in that. I mean, there is nothing different between us and people in the world who have three or four friends that they enjoy. You say, "Why do I need the difficult person in my life?"

Allow me to let you in on a little secret. The fruit of the Spirit cannot be brought forth in your life without difficult people and without difficult circumstances. I mean how is the fruit of the Spirit of patience produced in your life unless you are put in a situation that calls for you to be patient? How can you learn the fruit of the Spirit of self-control, unless you are tempted to be angry or to blurt something out? Do you understand that your friends do not produce the fruit of the Spirit in your life? People you enjoy being around do not produce the fruit of the Spirit in your life. Difficult people do.

One person wrote that difficult people are the nails that God uses to nail our flesh to the cross. If you say you don't need difficult people in your life or a particular difficult person in your life, a particularly draining person in your life, then you reveal about yourself a profound lack of personal insight regarding your own deficiencies.

We need everyone. We need edges knocked off of us. It is unpleasant, I know. No one likes to be ground down. No one likes the edge to be pounded off of them. No one likes to be stretched spiritually to love someone that we don't love, to be kind when we feel like being unkind, to be patient when we feel like being impatient and hasty. But God has arranged this. That is what Paul says.

God has arranged this. And spiritual people understand that. There is a reason why that person is in your life. God has a place for every person in this church.

And so we spiritual people realize that we need each other. And in verse 25, Paul sums it up, "So that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, each part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it."

You know, a good way to measure your spirituality is to see whether you really do suffer when another person in the church is hurting. If it is no big deal to you that someone else in the Vineyard is hurting, someone else is sick, their family is in crisis, if you can just walk away and if your heart doesn't cry out on their behalf, if you don't want to reach out to them in prayer and concern, you don't have very much of the Holy Spirit, Friend, because you are not very well connected with what God is doing, joining us together. I mean when you have a toothache, your whole body aches. Your jaw is not happy. Your head is not happy. When one person suffers, we all suffer. That is a mark of our spirituality.

But, perhaps the greatest mark of our spirituality is when one person rejoices, do we all rejoice together? I mentioned this last week, I believe, but I think a great test of our Christian maturity is how well we handle each other's successes. I find that I often wince a little bit when someone in my particular sphere is highly praised. And it takes real prayer to overcome wincing, to enjoy the praise of everyone. And I see other people around me wince when someone in their sphere and someone they tend to compare themselves to is highly praised. Do you enjoy the honor of another?

Gordon MacDonald in one of his books quotes a story. It goes like this: The devil was once crossing the desert when he came upon some demons who were tormenting a Christian monk. The monk easily dealt with the demons. They were trying to get him to feel lost and he bounced that off. They were trying to get him to desire creaturely comforts and he knocked that demon away. So the devil stepped forward to give these lower demons a lesson in temptation. And he said, "Watch this." And he whispered in the monk's ear, "Your brother has just been named Bishop." And at once the monk's face became twisted in jealousy and anger. The devil turned to his fellow demons and he said, "That, my friends, is how it is done."

When one part is honored, the other parts rejoice. We enjoy and rejoice in each others' successes. Friends, what the Holy Spirit is doing in our midst is creating real Christian spirituality, causing us to respect the Lordship of Christ, to reject feelings of inferiority and relate to different people the way Christ would. Let's pray.