

1 Corinthians 12:12-31 AM

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Date: 21 April 2024

Preacher: Rev. Chris Ley

[0 : 00] Would you pray with me as we stand? We pray the words of Ezekiel 34 back to God. Father, full of your spirit, as we now come to your word, I pray you feed us through it.

I pray through hearing your word, you would strengthen us to strengthen the weak, to heal the sick, to bind up the injured, to bring back those who have strayed, to seek for those who are lost. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. As you sit, it'd be helpful to grab the Bible right in front of you. It's either blue or black. And turn to page 959.

We're going to be referencing this. I have it printed in front of me, so I don't close it and put it to the side because I don't now need it. But it'd be helpful for you if you had it. Well, I think this is the best time of year.

I'm totally biased. My birthday was a few weeks ago. But we're totally surrounded right now by spring, if you live in Vancouver. You go outside on a day like today and you see life everywhere.

[1 : 15] New life bursting up from the ground and from the tree branches. You hear birds singing. You see beauty. And once again, daylight dominates our days.

This time of year after Easter, darkness retreats in Vancouver. The cold of winter is replaced with light and with life.

And these realities outside in our environment reflect the good news we celebrate in churches in April. We remember at Easter that Jesus died.

And three days later, he rose from the dead. We proclaim that death has been overwhelmed by life. Darkness eclipsed by light.

That through Christ, new life is now offered to all. The era we live in today. This season after Jesus has been raised from the dead is a spiritual springtime.

[2 : 15] And our text this morning is a great place to go in this season of growth and new life. Because 1 Corinthians 12 describes how all of us can grow in true spirituality.

This text is perfect if you're looking to grow in faith. It's simple. It's practical. And it's encouraging. So whether you're a guest with us today exploring the Christian faith. Or whether you've just become a Christian. Or whether you've been one for decades. 1 Corinthians 12 shows two ways for all of us to grow in true spirituality.

First, to grow spiritually, we grow in the Holy Spirit. And second, to grow spiritually, we give ourselves to help grow the body of Christ.

Grow in the Spirit. Help grow the body. That's how all of us can grow in true spirituality. And that's what our text this morning teaches us. So first, how to grow in the Spirit.

[3 : 21] Something may be surprising about a place like Vancouver, which is incredibly secular, is to be spiritual is a virtue here. Despite the decline in interest in organized religion, locals like to be considered spiritual.

Most spirituality in our city is self-focused and wrong-headed. But it doesn't change the fact that people are open to God.

People want to know God. Our neighbors want to know God's presence and His peace and His power in their lives.

So if you are spiritual and you are searching for God this morning, I have some great news. 1 Corinthians 12 teaches us how to grow in true spirituality.

Not man-made, self-curated, vague, vacuous, undefined spirituality. But true spirituality. Today, all of us receive an invitation to experience the permanent presence of God in our lives.

[4 : 28] Which surely should be the definition of true spirituality. Our passage tells us simply that we grow in true spirituality by first living in the Holy Spirit.

God welcomes all of us to live our lives in Him. All we have to do is receive Him. Look at the language of our passage in verse 13.

For in one Spirit, we are all baptized into one body. Jews and Greeks, slaves or free, and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

I love this verse. It's a picture of immersion. Of saturation. Of being covered and consumed and filled with God Himself. God the Holy Spirit.

Alive and at work in you. Christians live in God's Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God abides in us.

[5 : 31] And we in Him. The way to grow in true spirituality is to live your life in the Holy Spirit. To live empowered by the reality that God Himself is alive in you.

And this is so much better than any man-made, buffet-style, self-maintained spirituality. God the Holy Spirit opens Himself to you and invites you to live your life in Him.

This is true spirituality. To live in intimate connection and communion with the God of the universe. So how do you know if you're living in the Holy Spirit?

How do you know if the Holy Spirit is alive in you? If you look back to our text at the end of verse 3 in chapter 12, you see, No one can say Jesus is Lord except in the Holy Spirit.

So if you believe that Jesus is Lord, that Jesus is God Himself, then you are already living in the Holy Spirit. God's Holy Spirit is already in you.

[6 : 46] If you accept that Jesus is the Son of God who came to take away the sins of the world, then you are in the Holy Spirit already. If you believe that Jesus died on the cross to take away your sins, if you believe He was buried to show us that He was truly dead, and then three days later He really rose from the dead to show that He's Lord over all, if you believe this, that Jesus is Lord, then you are already in the Holy Spirit.

So the way to know if a person is filled with the Holy Spirit, if a person is truly spiritual, is to ask them who they think Jesus is. And if Jesus is your Lord, then you have come to that belief by God the Holy Spirit entering into your heart and turning you to Christ.

If you have never said or never believed that Jesus is Lord, but maybe you're feeling a stirring in your heart right now, that is God the Holy Spirit turning you to Christ.

That is an invitation for you to now grow and know true spirituality, to repent of your sins, to receive His forgiveness and grace, and to respond in faith and in worship and in obedience.

Your new life in the Spirit can start right now, if you accept that Jesus is Lord. Paul goes on to say that if you're living in the Holy Spirit, you should expect to be given gifts from the Spirit.

[8 : 20] Now notice these are gifts. These are not skills that you naturally possess already. They're not character traits. These are unique gifts that have been given to you, that before you did not have.

But now, because Jesus is your Lord, and because you live in the Holy Spirit, you have been gifted by God these gifts for the common good. And these gifts, too, are evidence of true spirituality.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are diverse. And the lists in our text cover gifts of speech and gifts of service. Gifts of word and gifts of deed.

All of these gifts are evidence that God's Holy Spirit is in you. One of you recently shared with me, after one of our Sunday services, that decades ago, you made a friend with someone from China who spoke Mandarin, and you didn't speak Mandarin.

So you brought them to your church, but they didn't really connect. Because of the language barrier. So, being a great friend, you took them to a Mandarin-speaking church. And when you took them there, the people at that church asked you if you spoke Mandarin.

[9 : 33] You said you didn't. And they said, pray about it. And so you did. And so did they. And then one day, at this church, you opened your mouth to pray with a group.

And to your surprise, you started praying in perfect Mandarin, as if it were your mother tongue. The Holy Spirit dwelling within one of you gave you a unique gift, a new tongue, a human language that you didn't have before.

It was a miracle. It's impossible to explain. And now, decades later, this person, who is among us today, still speaks fluent Mandarin.

But God has used that spirit-given gift for the common good, for the building up of the church, and the serving of others. This was not the story I was expecting to hear at the end of one of the St. John services a few weeks ago.

And the person ended their story by telling me, you don't need to convince me that God is real. No kidding. This person knows true spirituality.

[10:42] It's a sensational story. It's so sensational, I almost didn't want to share it. Because the rest of us probably now feel inadequate or jealous. Because we don't have that gift.

But rather than put a single person on a pedestal, let's instead worship the God who dwells within all his people and gifts each of us uniquely, supernaturally, with gifts of speech or gifts of service, all to be used for the common good.

There are a lot of stories in this room many of us could share about how God has gifted us miraculously for the common good. Last night, our refugee ministry had a dinner celebrating what God has done in bringing over 50 refugees to Canada through our church.

31 last year alone. This is a miracle. This would not have happened if God's Holy Spirit did not gift dozens of people in this room with gifts of speech and gifts of service.

At lunchtime today, you can go downstairs and hear how God uniquely gifted one member of our church to start an organization liberating children and women and men who are trafficked and enslaved in Cambodia.

[11:57] And if you go, you'll hear how Brian's ministry at Ratnak International is a total miracle. How God gifted people for the common good. This is how we grow in true spirituality.

We grow in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit, within all who proclaim that Jesus is Lord, pulls us together. We're given gifts to serve one another and to strengthen our unity.

In the Holy Spirit, we're baptized into one body. And in the Holy Spirit, all of us together become the body of Christ. The primary way you grow in true spirituality is you grow in the Holy Spirit.

But before we move on, notice something, please. So far, all the work of true spirituality has come from the Holy Spirit working within you.

Unlike the generic spirituality of our city, it's not up to us. Paul does not give a checklist of things you need to do to be more spiritual. Rather, he tells us what the Holy Spirit alive in us is already doing.

[13:04] In true spirituality, it is God who brings the growth. We don't grow in the Spirit by our own effort alone, but by first receiving the grace that God freely gives.

I have met with people this week who are growing in the Spirit by simply receiving the grace of God revealed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We're in a season of growth at this church.

The Holy Spirit is at work in this community, and he is bringing people to faith right now. The harvest is plentiful. And we grow in true spirituality by first growing in the Holy Spirit who enters us to empower us to confess Jesus as Lord and to receive gifts to be used for the common good.

food. The second way we grow in true spirituality is empowered by the Spirit we now give ourselves to help grow the body of Christ. And this is really where our passage takes us today.

In the Spirit, we've already read in verse 13, we're brought together to form one united body. This body is made of diverse members. In Corinth, verse 13 shows us it was diverse along racial and social lines.

[14:22] The church was composed of Jews and Greeks, of slaves and of free people. But here, our body is diverse as well. We're white and black, Asian and African, Canadian born and immigrant, English mother tongue and English as a second language, young and old, women and men, rich and poor, east side and west side and maybe even suburban.

Our body is in person and we're online. We're healthy and we're sick. We have renters and owners, people who are addicted and people who are clean, people who are single and those who are married.

Look around this room and note the diversity. And yet, we praise God with one voice. We stand as one and we affirm what we believe as one body.

We kneel together. We are fed at the table as one family. And this is a work of God. Uniting us as one body in Christ by baptizing us in the Holy Spirit.

This passage is a celebration of the diversity and the unity of the body of Christ. It tells us that all of us have a critical part to play in serving one another and growing our fellowship in Christ.

[15:44] Christ. And to make this point, for the rest of the chapter, Paul speaks first to people who feel unimportant or inferior to the body, showing them the critical importance of diversity in the church.

This is verses 14 to 20, if your Bible's still open. And then right after that, Paul addresses the people in the church who feel they're superior, showing them that the apparently weaker members of the church deserve greater honor because they are indispensable to the body's health and unity.

I just want to look at each of these very briefly. So first, Paul speaks to those who feel unimportant. Verse 12 summarizes Paul's main point by stating that just as the body is one and has many different members, all the members of the body, though many, are one body.

God has created the church, Christ's body, to be diverse. Our diversity is what enables our function as one body. A body with diverse parts and cells all working together as a healthy body.

We need everyone of every gifting to use their gifts for the church to function at its best. The Holy Spirit makes us distinct from one another, each of us uniquely gifted, all for the benefit of the one collective body.

[17:03] And we grow in true spirituality as we use our unique gifts to build up the body of Christ. Christ. So we don't compare our gifts, we don't rank the gifts, we don't covet the gifts of others, but rather we celebrate the diversity of our gifts that together, collaboratively, make the body united and strong.

So if you come to this place and you feel spiritually inferior to others, recognize that the body grows by diverse members with diverse giftings working together to build one another up.

Your gifts are not insignificant if they are less obvious in this church body or if it seems that few other people have the gifts you have. This doesn't mean you're unimportant, this means you're essential because we need your unique gifting for our body to grow and to thrive.

All the vastly different cells of the human body are designed uniquely for different tasks, but all of them are given the same DNA, the same essence, the same goal to see the whole body thrive as one cohesive, united organism.

So in the same way, the church needs diverse people with diverse gifts given by God, the Holy Spirit, dwelling within each one of us, with all of us working in our own specialties for the collective good of the body.

[18:31] Christian faith is not a private, personal spirituality. To believe in Jesus is to be brought into his body. So true spirituality is exhibited in love for and oneness with the body of Christ, which is the church.

Many people will say, I really like Jesus, but I really hate the church. And I get that. The church has erred and strayed through history.

It has at times wandered from Jesus and done terrible things. The church in Corinth had wandered from Jesus. It doesn't sound like a very nice place to visit on a Sunday morning, especially if you're poor or seemingly unimpressive.

But just because the church has failed, both in Paul's time and in ours, does not mean it is not still Christ's body, Christ's bride, and the place where God's Holy Spirit is uniquely at work in the world. Like a human body, the church can get sick, can get an infection, a parasite, or even a cancer that attacks the body and threatens its health and its unity.

[19:43] Evil can be at work within the church, which is why we need to grow in true spirituality, empowered by the Holy Spirit within us, drawing us together as one in Christ, gifting us uniquely to collectively build up and strengthen the body.

So don't give up on the church, even if it has failed you. Rather, be filled with the Holy Spirit, grow in true spirituality by using your gifts to build up the body and help heal and restore it where it is sick or weak or in error.

The place we grow in true spirituality is here, striving to be one body empowered and living by the Holy Spirit. After celebrating the diversity within the church, Paul now gives a word to those with the body who feel superior in verses 21 to 26.

Listen to verse 22. Paul writes, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those parts of the body that we think less honorable, we bestow the greater honor.

The point's simple. It's this. Give greater honor to the parts of the body that seem weaker. Because those apparently weaker parts are indispensable and absolutely essential to our growth and our true spirituality.

[21:07] There was a Roman Catholic priest and a celebrated academic whose name was Henri Nouwen. He studied and taught at Notre Dame and then Yale and then Harvard. Pretty good.

He was an international expert on Christian spirituality and growth. He wrote on this, he spoke on this, he lectured on this. And yet, after a 25-year, very successful career, in his 50s, after decades of being a priest and lecturing at universities, he writes that he found in his own life, quote, he was praying poorly, living isolated from other people, and preoccupied with burning issues.

People around him were saying he was doing really well, but something inside him was telling him that his success was putting his soul in danger. He continues that he woke up one night and he realized that he was living in a very dark place and that the term burnout was a convenient psychological translation for his spiritual death.

He wasn't growing in true spirituality, despite being a priest and a scholar who wrote on Christian spirituality. Despite his professional success, he was dying spiritually.

So he prayed earnestly, Lord, show me where to go and I will follow you. And through others, God spoke clearly, saying, go and live among the poor in spirit and they will heal you.

[22 : 32] So Henri moved from Harvard, surrounded by the best and brightest academics to a small community created for people with mental disabilities in Toronto called L'Arche. Nouwen moved into a home full of people with special needs who hadn't read any of his books.

They didn't care about any of his accolades. And he found that God used this community of marginalized people whom society generally considers weaker or of little value practically to heal him and to show him how to grow in true spirituality.

His book, *In the Name of Jesus*, is the best book on leadership I've ever read and he tells more of the story there. Through living with people with special needs, Henri Nouwen was built up in true spirituality.

God restored him through a life of service to the marginalized. So do not discount any member of the body of Christ of being of lesser value.

I've said before that I think my children, who are six and eight, have taught me as much about God's love for me in following Jesus as anyone else ever has. We who feel spiritually significant or superior ought to look to those we consider weaker, less important, poorer in spirit, as indispensable parts of the body that must be cherished and protected and honored and allowed to use their gifts as well to build up the body of Christ.

[23 : 59] We should be sensitive to people who may feel weak among us, insignificant, like they have little to offer. If you are new here or feel intimidated by this church due to your age or your race or your social status or if English is your second language, I want you to hear that no one is a second-class citizen in God's kingdom.

All who proclaim Jesus as Lord have God the Holy Spirit dwelling within them. They are a child of God. No person or group is a lesser member of St. John's.

And if you have been made to feel that way, we must beg your forgiveness. All of us must commit to loving our neighbors and celebrating the people God is bringing into our midst, whoever they are and whatever gifts they do or do not possess.

We ought to honor people here who feel insignificant or weak and show them what great value they have to our body. The new people coming currently to our church are young adults, immigrants for whom English is a second language, and the elderly.

All three of these people groups one could consider inferior or weak for different reasons, but that's totally wrong. To the seeming weaker members, we bestow the greater honor because they are indispensable to our body, because they bring diversity and unique gifts that build us up.

[25 : 36] 1 Corinthians 12 shows us that we grow in true spirituality by growing in the Holy Spirit and by then helping to grow the body of Christ. We celebrate the diversity of our body and we strive to serve one another so that all of us are built up and our unity is preserved.

We do not look down on people we may consider weaker or less useful to our body, but we celebrate the unique gifting everyone here has been given.

We are in a season of growth. It is spiritual springtime. There's new life all around us and all of us can grow in true spirituality by growing in the Spirit and by helping to grow Christ's body.

Thanks be to God. Amen.