

with true spirituality

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[0 : 00] If you've got a free moment this afternoon, take a look at the WikiHow article, How to Become More Spiritual. It begins with this introduction.

Do you sometimes feel like you've lost yourself or that you're not really yourself at all? Or do you simply want to grow or become who you should be?

Here are some tips to help. Then it goes on and suggests 12 things on how to become more spiritual. So I'll mention just a few. Number one, go to a place with no noise at all and sit down. Number two, start meditating. You can sit in a yoga position if you would like. Presumably you're able to get into a yoga position.

Number three, clear your mind of all thoughts. Easier for some than others, I suspect. Number six, list some of your life goals and celebrate if you've achieved them.

[1 : 03] Create steps to progress with goals still remaining. Say a prayer. Sing a song. Take a break and hop around a bit. It actually says that.

Number nine, some additional spiritual goals. Explore other belief systems. Sacrifice and accept the sacrifice of others. Develop an open mind in order to develop a closed mind.

If someone can explain that one for me, I'd be very grateful. And so the list goes on. Interesting, there's no need to mention God or any particular truth claim, let alone to mention Jesus.

There is a similar article called How to be Spiritual Without Being Religious. Its introduction says, We are all inventors, each sailing out on a voyage of discovery, guided each by a private chart, of which there is no duplication.

That is, you're finding your way in a lost world with your own map that you've created. The world is all gates. It's all opportunities.

[2 : 11] Have you looked into organised religion and still found something missing? Well, here are some ways to connect with a higher power on your own terms.

That pretty much sums up the mood of our society. I don't know if you've noticed it, but here in Sydney, being religious has gone out of fashion. That includes Christianity, whereas being spiritual is actually in.

To be religious is to be judgmental, repressed, uptight, but to be spiritual is to be in touch with your feelings, to be free-spirited, to be tranquil, to be individualistic, and to be well-rounded, but without necessarily believing in anything in particular.

The surprising thing is, all this would have gone down really well in first century Corinth. It was a trendy to be spiritual in Corinth.

Being in Greece, Corinth held strongly to Greek ideals of individualism, equality, freedom, and distrust of authority.

[3 : 18] And so if you mix that with Corinth being a major trading place for the Roman Empire, with people pouring in for business from all over the world, the culture of Corinth becomes a melting pot of cultures and morals and philosophies.

And spirituality. I wouldn't have gone down very well in Corinth. And so what Paul does here in this letter is he writes with a real sense of urgency.

He has spent two years in Corinth, but as soon as he's gone, some people started to lose their way pretty quickly. Basically, they were being marinated in the culture of Corinth.

The flavour of Corinth was permeating the church. Individuality and freedom to be your own person was in. They started thinking about their own spiritual needs.

They started to form factions behind leaders based on personalities and giftedness and personal preferences and how great they handled language. Each considered whichever group they were in to be the most spiritual, the most wise, the most godly.

[4 : 42] It's like there's a new reality TV show at Corinth, My Spirituality Rules. And as we pick it up in chapter 3, Paul tells them here how to be really spiritual.

We'll see that spirituality here, it's not an airy fairy thing. It's not about essential oils and candles around a bathtub.

It isn't about stopping from daily life and retreating to a quiet place, selling up everything, moving to the bush, cutting out meat and growing your own veggies, contemplating the universe and everything in splendid isolation.

The Bible describes something that is dynamic and solid and real and rational and life changing. To be spiritual is to understand what God has done for us in sending Jesus to die instead of us on a cross and living in a way that's shaped by that.

And living in a way with other people that is shaped by that. It is what Jesus called his disciples to do, to take up your cross and follow him. True spirituality is fundamentally practical.

[5 : 56] And so Paul begins chapter 3 with brothers. There's a hard rebuke coming in chapter 3, but he softens the rebuke by affectionately calling the people he's rebuking brothers.

He's speaking to his brothers in Christ here. He says in verse 1, Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly. Me infants in Christ, I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it.

Now that's expected. He's not rebuking them there. They were new to Christ when he was there and their baby steps are expected. Until this recent cool snap, my two-year-old Amelia had a habit of removing her shirt and quite happily spending the rest of the day like that.

She got it from Bailey Lowe, who apparently picked it up from his father. Millie, however, took it a little bit further.

On occasion, she preferred to remove all of her clothes and run around the backyard. And not long, her elder sisters followed her example and did exactly the same thing.

[7 : 13] Now I've got to confess, as their dad, I struggle with this a bit. Now I don't mind it in moderation in the house, but I struggle with it in the backyard.

And I struggle with it a little more when someone visits and little Millie insists on performing a dance routine. It's kind of embarrassing.

I struggle with it, but I put up with it. But I'm happy to go on record and say that if this pattern of behaviour continues, there will be a day when I won't be happy with it.

Getting your gear off is okay for a toddler, but a day is coming when it won't be appropriate behaviour. And that's what Paul is saying here.

There comes a point when you've got to grow up and you've got to put your babyish behaviour behind you and it's embarrassing and it's inappropriate.

[8 : 11] And that's their problem. See what he says next? Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly?

Are you not acting like mere men? For when one says, I follow Paul, another says, I follow Apollos, are you not mere men? Are you not acting like babies?

They've been Christians for ages, but they're still behaving in a way that doesn't fit with the cross-shaped life.

He calls them here worldly and he calls them mere men twice. Now remember, the perspective of Paul is addressing this church as brothers. And so he isn't saying that they're not Christian.

He's not saying that. The distinction he makes in this chapter is between the Christian controlled by the flesh and the Christian that is controlled by the Spirit of God. The King James Version, it uses the term carnal here.

[9 : 14] And many have picked up the idea since then as the carnal Christian. And some have even described the carnal Christian as a person who has accepted Jesus as their saviour, but not as their Lord.

The New Testament doesn't know of such a distinction. You cannot have Jesus as your saviour if he's not your Lord. The New Testament doesn't know that distinction.

Paul doesn't have in mind here two classes of Christian. He's not looking out at the church of Corinth and going, spiritual carnal, carnal, spiritual, spiritual carnal, carnal, carnal. That's not what he's doing here.

He's actually saying this is an issue for all Christians, a question for all of us. What is controlling us? Are we being led by our natural desires or are we being led by the Spirit of God?

Paul has something similar in Galatians chapter 5 when he addresses the characteristics of the sinful nature against those of the fruit of the Spirit. And he says these things, he says things like, the acts of the sinful nature include things like jealousy, dissension, factions, envy.

[10 : 29] The issues of Corinth. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Paul doesn't have in mind for us to go through a list like that and go, well, I'm patient, need to work on self. You know, I'm... The idea of the fruit of the Spirit is that we would grow in all of them at the same time.

That's what separates the fruit of the Spirit. Some of us are natural, have a tendency towards patience where others don't. What separates natural tendencies from the fruit of the Spirit is that we grow in all of them at the same time.

And so what Paul does here is he gives these churches a slap in the face. They aren't as spiritual as they think they are. The Galatians 5 description of the acts of the sinful nature describe the Corinthian church to a T.

They're acting like mere men. The competitive self-promotion culture of Corinth was influencing the church. They were taking hold of the distinctives of the different leaders and lining up behind them and moralising the distinctives.

[11 : 49] It's so easy to do, isn't it? Because frankly, we see differences all around us. And instead of looking at each other through the lenses of the cross, we moralise our distinctives.

I'm a traditionalist, and so I'm more orthodox. Or I'm a non-traditionalist, and so I'm less rigid and therefore more spiritual. I believe this, so that makes me better than those who hold a different view.

Let me tell you, and I'm not... I exist as a Sydney Anglican clergyman in a culture where we do that. Where we moralise our distinctives and form factions and judgements of one another. That is, we've allowed our culture to permeate us.

Our culture grows more performance-centred each passing year. Competition infects our play, our school, our sports, our work. In the workforce, you face longer hours on the job with less security and more performance-based evaluation than there was ever anticipated a generation ago.

[13 : 07] It's unfortunate that the spirit of competition, comparison with one another and rewards based on merit have overwhelmed many aspects of the Christian life, both individually and corporately.

Far too many Christians think that God relates to them like they're taskmasters that they know in their jobs and in their homes and their families.

And that they therefore expect daily blessings or daily punishments based on their assessment of daily levels of faithfulness and obedience to God.

That's just performance thinking of our culture. That competitiveness infiltrates our relationships with one another. Our hearts are always looking for a leg up over each other.

We're always trying to climb the next rung up on the ladder over each other. Deep down inside, we're always looking to be more noble than others.

[14 : 12] How often do we roll our eyes inside at each other? It is very rare for us to see the differences we have in the church for things like liturgy and music and leadership and a multitude of other things as secondary issues of personal preference and not to moralise those issues.

We moralise them. We put tags on each other. You're a traditionalist. You're a consumer. We create moral significance where there is just simply difference.

And that's what the Corinthians were doing. I'm a poor guy. Therefore, I'm better than you guys who follow poor Apollos and Cephas.

And it was squeezing out the gospel of grace. How liberating it would be when the church decides instead to model a countercultural lifestyle, loving people unconditionally as Christ did on the cross. We need to recover the foundational emphasis on gratitude for the grace of God as the primary motivation for everything.

[15 : 32] And that is why Paul calls this church to keep looking at the cross. The doctrine of grace is arguably the watershed that separates Christianity from all other world religions and systems of philosophical thought.

Factions and divisions based on personal preference are anti-gospel. They are unspiritual. The Corinthian church hadn't moved beyond mere human nature.

In the rest of chapter 3, Paul gives this church some perspective on those divisions in the hope that it will lead them to true spirituality and living this cross-shaped life together. So very quickly, the first bit of perspective he wants them to see is that they have misunderstood the nature of leadership. The leaders are all lining up. Sorry, the people are all lining up behind leaders and they're fighting with one another. And the leaders that they're lining up behind are all the same. He takes them in their imaginations into a farmer's paddock. Verse 4. What after all is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants through whom you came to believe as the Lord has assigned to each his task.

[16:52] I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God is the one who made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who makes things grow.

The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be watered according to his own labour. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building. So Paul's advice here is that our focus should always be on God, on Christ crucified, and not on our leaders, no matter how loving and gifted and charismatic they are.

He doesn't say that you get rid of them. It's a relative term here. He's saying that the leaders are only so good as that they point to the crucified Christ. That's your focus.

Notice the question, what after all is Apollos? What after all is Paul? Not who, but what? They are servants. They aren't gurus.

[17:54] Verse 9 says that they are God's fellow workers. That is, Paul and Apollos, in their distinctives, in their differences, are actually in partnership. They are fellow workers.

They are partners owned, possessed by God. They are God's fellow workers. They're on God's team. They are creating division in this church where division doesn't exist.

In all their difference, they are being used by God to draw people to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The second bit of perspective on the divisions that Paul wants to give them in hope that it's going to lead them to this cross-shaped life together is that God really cares about what you do to his church.

Look at verses 10 to 17 with me. By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds, for no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw, his work will be shown for what it is because the day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work.

[19:18] If what he has built survives, he'll receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss. He himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's spirit lives in you?

If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him, for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple. There are two things going on here.

Primarily, Paul is talking about people like me, people who teach the church and lead the church. The problem was Paul taught the gospel of the crucified Lord Jesus to the Corinthians, and then some others came in, not Apollos.

He's friends with Apollos. Some others have come in and replacing that foundation with something else. His point is that if you try to build the church with anything else than the gospel of the crucified Christ, that is, if the doctrine of grace is not foundational, it is like building a church, building a building with wood, hay, or straw, and the big bad wolf can come in and blow it over.

It won't survive the testing. And those who have spent their time building like that have fundamentally wasted their time, and it will be a terrible shock for them when they have to explain to Jesus what they thought they were doing.

[20:46] And so the fear here is not condemnation, but lack of commendation. Paul instead encourages us here to build with gold, silver, and precious stones, not just because they were inflammable, but because in the ancient world, that's what you use to build temples.

They didn't build their brick houses and say to themselves, I've got this marvellous diamond. Where on earth am I going? Oh, right. Great door knocker. I mean, that's asking for all sorts of problems.

The building that they were called to build here is the temple. What then is the temple that we're called to build? He makes it clear in verses 16 and 17. It's there in the words you.

It's plural. It's people. He has in here the people of God, the church. And so this is the bit that applies primarily to people like me.

People like me will be held accountable, not for the building or renovation works of St. Paul's Chatswood, but for the people of St. Paul's Chatswood.

[21 : 58] And primarily was the crucified Lord Jesus front and centre in life and ministry. But there's also a more general application that is really for all of us.

It's clear from these verses that if you're a Christian, then one day you're going to have a face-to-face interview with Jesus about the way in which you've lived and what you've done, all of us.

This is about whether we have given ourselves to the building up of what God loves. The word for temple in verses 16 and 17 is quite specific. It is referring to the part of the temple where God actually dwelt, the Holy of Holies in the Old Testament temple.

And Paul is saying that the church is God's sanctuary. It's where he dwells with his people. It is holy turf. It is sacred stuff. And they were treating the church something that is so precious to God as if it was just a toy.

Some cheap toy. You know, in the past, you know, when my kids, well, they're still little, I'd walk through, and I still have a tendency to do this, walk through the China glassware section of David Jones, which ironically you've got to get to the toy section.

[23 : 19] I would grab my kids so they don't touch anything because to them, this crystal is just a toy. They don't understand the difference of what is precious and what is not.

And that is the problem with this church at Corinth. You're treating the church like a toy when it is so fundamentally precious to God. And that's why there's this serious warning in verse 17.

If you destroy what God loves and where he dwells, he will destroy you. That is different to the person building with wood, hay, and straw.

Two different people in mind here. At least the person building with wood and hay and stuff is building something, and they themselves won't be lost. The person here is not trying to build.

They're trying to tear down. And God will tear them down. They will be lost. And the warning for the Corinthians here is that you can't continue in your mere man divisiveness because it only ultimately leads in one direction.

[24 : 38] The destruction of what God loves. You can't keep going down that path. So heed the warning. If they truly understood how precious the church is to God, then they would sacrifice to make sure that it was built.

To be truly spiritual people, we need to be passionate about the church that God loves and is building through the crucified Lord Jesus. You cannot be truly spiritual in isolation.

Being spiritual is a team thing. It is to care passionately about God's people and to see them built up into and up in Lord Jesus.

The last bit of perspective of what of their divisions that Paul gives them in the hope they're going to live this cross-shaped life together is that God has already given us everything that we need.

We don't need to be trying to be trying to be trying to climb higher and push each other down. We've all got everything we need in Jesus.

[25 : 42] Why try and climb over a top of one another? Why to try and get supremacy and to consider ourselves better than others?

Paul here goes back to the language of wisdom he used before in verse 18. He's basically saying that you cannot, in those first few verses there, you cannot make sense of life without Jesus.

Verse 21, he says, So then, no more boasting about men. All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future.

All are yours and you are of Christ and Christ is of God. So these last few verses here are effectively a summary of the first three chapters of 1 Corinthians.

Paul says that grasping what Jesus has done for us on the cross is what makes us wise. You see, the cross nullifies human wisdom.

[26 : 46] It nullifies human boasting and the competition. It nullifies the divisiveness over who's the greatest, the most spiritual and the most gifted. See it there in verse 21? No more boasting about men.

All things are yours. And then he turns their factions on their head. Here they are saying, I belong to Paul and I belong to Apollos and I belong to Cephas.

And what does Paul say? All things are yours. All things are yours. Including Paul and Apollos and Cephas. You don't belong to them.

They belong to you. The crucified Christ has made them your servants to lead you into every blessing in Christ.

The way Paul goes on here to define all things in verses 21 and 22 leaves little room for us to exclude any blessing.

[27 : 50] Paul takes them. Paul takes them back to his introduction in chapter 1. The grace of God to them in the crucified Lord Jesus has enriched them in every possible way.

It's enriched them. All things are theirs. This is a promise that sets us free to live in light of the cross. Grasping what Jesus has done for us means that we will see that God has made us part of his family. Not because of anything that we have done.

And that he hasn't held anything back from us. Grace, by grace he has given us everything that we need for life, health, for safety, rest, for relationships.

The cross sets us free to see things as they really are. The cross sets us free to enjoy life now and to be able to cope with the small annoying pressures of daily life.

[29 : 03] And the enormous life changing pressures of a daily life. The cross helps us to cope with the fear of death. Everything we need to live for God now has been handed to us on a plate in Jesus.

God says we are his. He belongs to Jesus. And there is nothing else we need. To the degree that we belong to Jesus, all these blessings belong to us.

To the degree that we are shaped by the cross, these blessings belong to us. The gospel breaks the chains of competitiveness and the divisions that they cause.

The gospel makes it a level playing field. Equal in Christ. Look at the cross and see that God, what he has given you, that he's given you everything in Jesus.

And so live in a way that fits with that. That is true spirituality. There is a very clear reason why we have treasured Jesus written in the middle of our mission statement as a church.

[30 : 23] True spirituality is about grasping what Jesus has done for us on the cross and living in a way that fits with that. True spirituality is about treasuring Jesus above everything.

To make it even more explicit for us as a church, we have a core value called treasuring Jesus together. It exists to remind us daily to do battle against the things that will destroy the church, the things that were threatening to destroy the church at Corinth.

And cause us to grow up into true spirituality together. It says, It says,

It says, It says, My friends, Preach the cross to yourself every day. Amen.