

GIFT-WRAPPED IN SKIN

1 Corinthians 12
WEFC May 23, 2010

The Church is a group of people under God's authority or leadership. Primarily the Church is to be a spiritual people.

With "spirituality" becoming popular in North America, it is necessary to clarify what "spirituality" is. The popular meaning is very different from the biblical.

That which makes a Church hum is when we clearly see who we are and who God is ... and do not mix up one with the other.

To get His Church to work well, God supplied something called SPIRITUAL GIFTS.

... which are "special abilities" given by the Holy Spirit to Christ-followers to carry out its responsibilities in making Jesus Christ known.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS are different from SPIRITUAL CHARACTER.

| GIFTS | SPIRITUAL CHARACTER |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">- focus on service- means to an end- what a person has- distinguishes us from one another in service- given from without- will one day cease | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- focus on character- the end result- what a person is- make us like Christ- developed from within- permanent |

1 Corinthians 12 speaks about SPIRITUAL GIFTS.

Spiritual gifts come gift-wrapped in skin.

God trusts us with some of His abilities.

Spiritual Gifts are not spiritual bragging rights. There is no one gift that outdoes all the other gifts.

You cannot necessarily tell the character of a person by the gift they possess.

That was the problem at the local church in Corinth. They tried to connect a greater degree of spirituality to one particular gift, that if you had THAT gift ... you were "in"; you were spiritual.

What, specifically, does God-defined "spirituality" look like when it comes to Spiritual Gifts?

Background:

Problems appear to have been a dime a dozen at the Church in Corinth. Their perception of who they thought themselves to be and what they accurately was at times miles apart.

To their way of thinking, the ability to speak in a "tongue" - to talk to God in a "heavenly language" - was an indication of authentic spirituality.

The opening three verses of **1 Corinthians 12** appear to be saying that this matter of "speaking in tongues" or "ecstatic speech" is not a phenomenon unique to God's people.

It happens in cults, and I would not be surprised if it accompanies a person who is into heavily into drugs, and other religions. But in those instances, the demonic realm is responsible for that "unearthly" expression.

The point being this:

Just because a person speaks in a “spiritual language” does not mean that they are in with God.

There is singularly one outstanding truth, one rallying point, a “silver bullet” that is THE ANSWER as to what convinces one that the “language” being spoken is of God.

The reality of the Spirit of God’s presence is NOT confirmed by either by “spiritual speech” (tongues), nor by the powerful miracles, but rather by the clear and unashamed declaration and demonstration of Jesus Christ as Lord.

With that cleared up ... the prime considerations of this section, which includes **1 Corinthians 12, 13 and 14**, are given their due.

In this opening chapter we are clearly informed that ...

Key Thought:

Our ONE God has a flair for a diversity that knows its “center”.

We have one God who has developed multiple spiritual gifts.

Though we have ONE God, we do not have ONE prime spiritual gift.

To emphasize what God has minimized is to minimize the God who ought to be emphasized.

The God who gives spiritual gifts is most definitely not locked into one gift.

One of the answers as to why a local Church isn’t what it could be and should be, concerns the development of Spiritual Gifts.

Here we see the right mixture of individual to group; of how a person relates to the entire church in this matter of Spiritual Gifts, or better ... this is how we ought to be Sunday by Sunday ... without getting all out of joint because of Spiritual Gifts..

12:4-11

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 working, but the same God works all of them in all men.

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues.

All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

Transition:

To biblically balance who we are individually and where we fit in the local church when it comes to Spiritual Gifts we need to push off the truth that ...

1. God’s enterprise is not mono-operational 4-11

The way a movement operates reflects the character of its founder.

Since God is at the center of biblical Christianity, His character should be seen through the way His Church operates. It is.

Christianity has only ONE HOLY SPIRIT, but the ONE SPIRIT does not merely give the same spiritual gift to everyone.

There is only ONE JESUS, but the ONE JESUS does not do serve or treat everyone in the same way. There are different ways of getting across the single reality and message.

There is only ONE GOD, but this ONE GOD works things out in a variety of ways ... at times through puzzling circumstances, in another setting through clear-cut events, ...through pain or possibly the thrill of fantastic success.

Our Triune God, Himself, uses a variety of ways to get across the great truth bundled up in Jesus.

12:7 & 11 explain **WHY** things are done this way or **WHAT** it is that we need to keep in mind as we deal with spiritual gifts.

12:8-10 give us a **sample list** of some of the gifts that Holy Spirits generously gives to the local church.

The gift of spiritual speech – tongues - is mentioned at the end in each of the lists in these paragraphs, not because it is the least important, but because that gift was the “problem” gift; the one that was being over-emphasized.

The spiritual gift display cabinet houses the following gifts:

wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, tongues and interpretation of tongues.

The Spirit of God gives these abilities to His local congregations so that the terrific news about Jesus might get out to a skeptical society.

He gives us all the necessary skills and tools to get the job done.

7

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

11

All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

- spiritual “gifts” come from a divine source – the Holy Spirit
- every person in God’s family is “gifted”
- the “gifts” are for the entire church (not for personal use)
- our particular gift(s) is Spirit-selected

God isn’t stuck on one gift. God has a flair that is refreshing and delightful.

Anyone who suggests that everyone needs a particular spiritual gift, in particular the gift of tongues, is not in line with God’s Word.

It is helpful to recognize our spiritual gifts, but we don’t need to get bent out of shape if we can’t put our finger on it.

But do get bent out of shape if you are not doing anything for God with and / or in the family of God.

Often our spiritual gift is what we enjoy doing, that we do without it really being a chore.

Application:

Our biblical response is ...

- I have not been overlooked or ignored by God. He has gifted me.

Every believer, without exception ... the Spirit has missed none of us.

- I am using my gifting for the local congregation by (doing what?) (“... for the common good”)

This is God's agenda.

This thing of attending church and not being involved in not from God. God gifts us “**for the common good**”.

Reverend Thomas Tewell writes:

My friend Andy Eddington, once the president of Shriners College in Texas, would go to prisons and preach to men on death row in Huntsville, Texas. I used to go with Andy every now and then, and on one of those trips we stopped at a greasy spoon on our way home to Dallas. Andy loved sugar in his coffee, so he took not one, not two, but three teaspoonfuls of sugar. As the waitress

watched, Andy said, "Ma'am, we're going to need more sugar for this table."

This Texas waitress looked at Andy and said, "Listen, bud, before I give you more sugar, you stir what you got."

Thomas Tewell, pastor, Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York, New York; from a plenary address at the Preaching with Passion Conference (5-31-01)

Key Thought:

Our ONE God has a flair for a diversity that knows its “center”.

2. God brings us together around Himself 12-13

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body.

So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

The local church, “the body” may have many parts, but each part contributes to the make-up of the body.

The local church has as its center – God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

- we enter into the family only through re-birth
- we identify ourselves through one common act - baptism
- loyalty to Christ trumps race or social status

- we all drink from one Spirit

There are many things that are the SAME, acts around which God intentionally unites us together.

Application:

A very strong sense of ONENESS, of TOGETHERNESS is to be an identifying mark of the family of God.

The way we operate, treat one another, work ... ONENESS is to be very prominent.

“Oneness” (togetherness) in God’s family will always trump individuality.

Within the family of God, the individual will virtually always submit to the larger family.

If we want to run our own show, the family of God will be a rough place for us,

We like the experience of togetherness, but getting it to work well is often difficult. So here is what we need to keep in mind, since this often is a sore point among us.

3. A spiritual church is comprised of people who know who they are as individuals, but never let that interfere with the church becoming what it is. 14-26

At times we want to be recognized, acknowledged, for someone to say something good about us. We want to contribute, give our two cents worth ... not to blow our own horn, but to have that satisfaction that we were a part of this big adventure.

When we can't get in, and we want to get in, we can make our presence known by interference; ... making unnecessary waves.

There is not a one of us who has not felt ...

- over-looked
- under-valued
- over-worked

When we get miffed here is what we say ... one of two things ... at different ends of the spectrum.

- Nobody around here cares about me or what I do.

... and ...

- I don't need you to mess things up for me.

Little has changed in human behavior over the centuries.

Miffed: Nobody around here cares about me or appreciates what I do

Follow the next two paragraphs written for us.

14-20

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.

Permit a paraphrase again of this section in the form of a sport's analogy coming from a sports announcer.

"Folks, ... what an arm! The quarterback just cocked his arm and threaded a needle with a bullet of a pass."

... and the foot says, "Great, while the hand is up there rifling a beautiful pass, I am stuck inside a smelly sock, get stepped on, straining myself to give this guy some balance and footing to be able to launch the ball. ... and do you think I get any recognition? When do I hear, 'Folks, look at those feet'?"

You know, I think I'll just detach myself from the quarterbacks leg and quit. I'm out of here."

- We can and do say things like this, but that doesn't change reality.

For some of us we always want to be the person in the spotlight. And so who we want to be changes with the hour. One Sunday morning we would like to start out as Pastor Dwight ... leading the congregation in singing. Then, we may want to preach and take over this job.

Monday, we think that you should be in the boss' office because we have all the good ideas and know how to make things take off.

At the baseball diamond, we should be coach, and at home we should be boss ...

If wherever we go, we are being over-looked and under-appreciated, then it may be time to admit that the problem is not out there, but that it resides in the person we see when we look in a mirror.

Our attitude, bad attitude, takes us out of the game and keeps us from enjoying the benefits of involvement, input and investment ... plus we get to be known as a "sour puss" in the church.

- Dwelling on comparisons robs us of what should be

- Like it or not, we remain a part of the local church.

... at times, withdrawn, distant and ticked off, but still part of God's body..

A switch needs to flip upstairs ... where we get the big picture cleared up.

- Our "assignments" come from God who has specifically placed us and "talented" us with what He knows to be best for us and His local church.

God is the most intelligent being there is ... and for us to complain about or question His "gifting" ends up being a covert way of telling Him that he is not doing a very good job.

What has happened is that our personal agenda has become more important than the agenda that God has laid out for His body, the Church.

"Many Gothic churches of the Middle Ages were built in the following way: a quarry site was established, often as much as 50 miles from the place where the church was to be erected. When the rocks were mined, volunteers from all over the countryside would form a living chain from the quarry to the building site. The rocks would then be passed from hand to hand all the way to the construction grounds."

David Louis, 2201 Fascinating Facts, p.32 (Ridge Press, 1983); submitted by Ted De Hass, Bedford, Iowa

It can turn out that we can be ...

Miffed: I don't need you to mess things up for me.

21-26

**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.

Who of us has not come to know that it is often easier and quicker to get a task done by ourselves than to work with others on the same project?

... helpful people often complicate our efficiency.

When it comes to the local Church ...

- there are some things a church and its members cannot say; one of them is to tell people, "We do not need you."

The people that God brings to Winnipeg Free are sent and delivered by God Himself.

That does not mean we throw standards out the window, but it does indicate a heart big enough to handle those we may not prefer.

We are not allowed to return to Sender, nor are we permitted to reassign people to another church.

- *God's people are not dispensable*

- *Church is not about projects, but people*

- *God-life / Church-life takes time*

- *Prominence is not to be equated with importance, though that is the way we operate as a society*

Our livers cannot boast of being good looking. Our kidneys do a lot of dirty work. Our veins and strung out through our bodies, but on their own would look like worms piled one on top of the other.

Yet, without those body members we would not be alive.

When Michael Jordan re-entered the NBA in 2001, there was a new and unusual rule enforced during a Washington Wizards basketball scrimmage: a no-shooting rule for Jordan.

In one exhibition match, Jordan's teammates stood around and waited for him to perform. The following day, Jordan and coach Doug Collins put a stop to that.

Jordan said, "Everybody wants to sit back and watch. But one [reason] why we became successful in Chicago was...we had to play as a unit instead of just watching.

"What makes me more effective is other guys stepping up and being a threat. If I'm the only threat, then I'm doing all the work. Obviously that's not going to work."

Jordan held fast to the no-shoot rule, even with the outcome of the scrimmage on the line. He was passed the ball with his team trailing by one and less than five seconds left, but he didn't take the open shot and passed the ball back.

Doug Corlew, Alta, Iowa; source: "Wizards Put Clamps on Jordan's Shots," Des Moines Register (10-20-01)

- What is not presentable is not discarded, but given special treatment

Making reference to sexuality, Paul notes that we go out of our way to make certain that the whole body is included.

There are times we "cover" certain people, people who have been wounded and wiped out; we step in and give them special attention.

- ***The Church is to be informed on the condition of its member's lives.***

That is a large task and one that is difficult, but if we want society to see the good that there is in Jesus Christ, then the members of the local Church become the God's display cabinet to the community where God has planted and placed it.

Do we have a ways to go? ... yes.

... and we will not get to where we need to be without you.

Sitting where we sit and making comments ... is as helpful as reading a medical manual to a dying person. Analyzing, diagnosing, probing, more information are generally not what is needed.

Grabbing the wounded or discouraged hand ... that is what is needed.

Expanding our circle, reaching outside our self-imposed limits, ... learning to say, "We need you", ... that is where God is leading us.

The "mix" that we have here at WEFC is a special mix – it is God's mix. He has combined us.

Note why it is that He has combined you with me, and me with you, and us with them:

... so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.

- the very people that we think take us down a notch are the very ones that God has brought so that we would not fall apart.

- equal concern - equal attention, equal love, equal opportunity - is what God wants us to develop with one another.

Jesse Jackson tells the story of a visit to the University of Southern Mississippi. While touring the campus with the university president, he noticed a towering male student, six-feet, eight-inches tall, holding hands with a midget coed barely three-feet tall. His curiosity piqued,

Jackson stopped to watch as the young man, dressed in a warm-up suit, tenderly picked up the midget, kissed her, and sent her off to class. The president explained that the student was a star basketball player. Both parents had died in his youth, and he made a vow to look after his sister. Many scholarship offers came his way, but only Southern Mississippi offered one to his sister too.

Jackson went over to the basketball star, introduced himself, and said he appreciated him looking out for his sister. The athlete shrugged and said, "Those of us who God makes 6' 8" have to look out for those he makes 3' 3"."

Philip Yancey, Rumors of Another World (Zondervan, 2003), p. 204

- The local congregation has it together when it walks in each others' shoes.

If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

Mutual concern and care ... God's intent for His church.

A spiritual church is comprised of people who know who they are as individuals, but never let that interfere with the church becoming what it is.

... putting it together ...

Church – God's people – some days we love them, on other days we would like to put them on a boat bound some place far across a couple of oceans..

If this is what spirituality is about, then it is huge area on which most of us need to work.

Key Thought:

Our ONE God has a flair for a diversity that knows its "center".

Learning to "love" and "value" God's flair for diversity is going to often push us to our limits.

We will hopefully move from tolerance, to acceptance, to care, to full inclusion and love ... which is where **1 Corinthians 13** takes us.

Centering on Jesus Christ draws us together while keeping us from tripping over each other.

If we as a local church are to be a good reflection of our God, that will require **expanding out to people, not expanding our principles.**

God's standards and limitations do not need revising or alteration.

The deeper work in our lives will be that of dealing with our own selfishness ... couched in our intelligence, packaged in our exclusivity, guarded by our acceptance.

We are very adept in making God fit into our ways ... and claiming His support for our choices.

God brings into our lives people that we do not click with so that we might get rid of our selfishness and become people of honest to goodness love.

... and so one of the matters to which we need to be alert is this – if I don't like you or don't get along with you – I probably need you more than I presently understand.

God has placed you in my way so that I might un-clutter my life of sin and become more like Jesus.

You will expose in me things I have a hard time seeing, and your presence, your “cooperation” will make that very evident.

That is why God has put you in front of my nose.

Your being dropped into my life is not a coincidence. This passage has consistently reminded us that God is the One who makes the additions to His Church.

God “combines”, “arranges every one of them, just as He wanted them to be,” He ... “gives them to each one, just as He determines”.

I need you more than I want to admit ... and often it will take time and patience on all of our parts.

Bailing out is like jumping out of a life-raft in the middle of the Pacific.

We can do it, but swallowing salt water and treading in it at the same time will make life tough.

It's better to be “in” and “with” the people of God, then to be “one of us”, standing on the outside.

This chapter pushes us beyond our limits. ... and if our minds are saying, “Yea, I know this, but it is impossible to put into practice”, or “I've tried it and lasted till I got to parking lot”, ... hold one.

Don't pack it in.

God is stretching us to the point where we tear our spiritual muscles if we are not spiritually semi-warmed up.

To prevent us from getting wiped out by the enormity of the delightful demands of this chapter, we need to keep in mind, what, Lord willing, we will step into next week, **1 Corinthians 13** – love of a different sort, that helps us rid out the rough events of life.

As we leave remember who we are, who the person beside you is, they are “gift-wrapped” in skin, a package from God.

You may know them intimately, or they may be a stranger to you,

They are indispensable to us

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a hospital, using her own money to buy bricks and mortar. The need for her services was so great, she performed surgery in her bathroom until the building was completed.

One operation involved the amputation of a common laborer's leg. Complications arose, and skin grafts were needed. A few days later, another doctor asked Chestnut why she was limping. "Oh, it's nothing," was her terse reply.

Finally, a nurse revealed that the skin graft for the patient, a coolie, came from Dr. Chestnut's own leg, taken with only local anesthetic.

During the Boxer Rebellion of 1905, Dr. Chestnut and four other missionaries were killed by a mob that stormed the hospital.

Leadership, Vol. 17, no. 2.

It is not about “our” own needs

27Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. **28**And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. **29**Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? **30**Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues[d]? Do all interpret? **31**But eagerly desire[e] the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way.

In "From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya" (*Academie*, 1983), Ruth Tucker writes about Dr. Eleanor Chestnut. After arriving in China in 1893 under the American Presbyterian missions board, Dr. Chestnut built

Father Greg Boyle is in the business of erasing the past. A Jesuit priest who is the founder and director of Homeboy Industries in East Los Angeles, Father Boyle has put together a team of physicians trained in the laser technology of tattoo removal. The team is part of a program that takes the tattoos of ex-gang members and wipes the slate clean. For many, it is as crucial a service as it is merciful.

Gang-related tattoos prevent many former gang members from getting jobs or advancing in work. For others, the markings critically impinge on mental health or put them in serious danger on the streets. There is no fee or community service required to receive the tattoo removal offered by Homeboy Industries. It is strictly a gift—perhaps a modern look at Christ washing the feet of his friends. Currently, there is a waiting list of over a thousand names.

For those involved, the spiritual imagery is often compelling. The seeming permanence of a gang tattoo fosters the attitude that the gang's claim is also permanent. It is a mark of ownership as much as identity. The emotional consequence is that it seems a part of you that can never be shaken.

I suspect some of us have felt like this with past mistakes—sins whose mark we cannot shake off, though we know we have been cleansed by Christ. Perhaps the imagery of tattoo removal can evoke a renewed sense of our blessed assurance. Like former gang members who have had the marks of a former life removed, so our

sins are blotted out by the blood of Christ. They are remembered no longer.

One of the curious things about the growing list of people interested in laser tattoo removal is that Father Boyle is straightforward about the procedure. The process of tattoo removal is extremely painful. Patients describe the laser procedure as feeling like hot grease on their skin. And yet the list grows, each name representing a life that longs to be free and is willing to endure the pain to seize it.

—Used by the permission of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries

Jill Carattini, "A Slice of Infinity," No. 1186, rzim.org (6-23-06); submitted by Jerry De Luca, Montreal West, Quebec, Canada

The beauty that comes from experiencing God's love through exposure to the body of Christ is much like the quality of becoming "Real" in the children's book *The Velveteen Rabbit*:

"What is REAL?" asked the Rabbit one day. "Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?"

"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real. It doesn't happen all at once. You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to those who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

Joe Aldrich, "How Do You Turn a Frog into a Prince?" Discipleship Journal (May/June 1981)

Dove soap has released a series of commercials that question the beauty industry's relentless pursuit of the "perfect woman."

In a commercial called "Evolution," a woman wearing no makeup walks to a chair and sits down. As the camera focuses on her face,

we see a series of time-lapse pictures that show her "evolve" into a billboard model.

First the make-up artists tone her skin to perfection. Then a horde of hairstylists surround her, transforming her straight, shoulder-length hair into a cascade of wind-blown, blond curls.

After dozens of pictures are taken, one shot is chosen, and computer designers begin to manipulate it. They make her neck longer, her eyes bigger, and her cheeks thinner. After recoloring her to perfection, the final, "perfect" woman is posted on a billboard for beauty products. As the commercial comes to a close, these words silently appear on the screen: "No wonder our perception of beauty is distorted."

The commercial can be viewed on [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1111111111) or on Dove's promotional website.

Bill White, Paramount, California; sources: [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1111111111) and campaignforrealbeauty.ca

While I was attending seminary, our two older children (ages 9 and 7) seemed to attract every other child in the mobile home park for after-school games of hide and seek.

Our youngest, Carrie, was not quite 3—and (in the minds of the older siblings) always in the way. It was something you could count on; ten minutes into the games our little one would get pushed aside or skin a knee.

One afternoon she came through the front door crying for mommy. She had gotten the worst again. My wife, Elizabeth, attempted to comfort her by giving her two freshly baked cookies. "Now, don't tell the big kids yet," she cautioned, "I haven't finished; I haven't got enough for everybody yet."

It took less than three seconds for Carrie to make it to the screen door, fling it wide, and announce to the big kids, "Cookies, I got cookies!"

Great news should be shared with enthusiasm!

When asked how he would describe his disabilities, Patrick Henry Hughes replied, "[They're] not disabilities at all—more [like] abilities."

Patrick was born without eyes and with a disease that makes it impossible for him to extend his arms or legs. Patrick's parents were devastated that their son would never lead a normal life. But when he was just nine months old, Patrick surprised everyone by exhibiting an unusual talent for music.

By the age of two, Patrick could play simple melodies on the piano. Patrick's father found great hope in his son's talent. "I was just ecstatic," he says of the discovery, because music gave the two a common bond. "We're not going to play baseball, but we're going to play music together."

Patrick's abilities were not limited to music. He was fluent in Spanish in high school, was a member of the National Honor Society, and maintained a nearly perfect GPA. But it was his musical ability that captured the public's attention. In fact, when Patrick headed to the University of Louisville in 2006, his reputation preceded him. Dr. Greg Byrne, the university's Associate Director of Bands, invited Patrick to join the marching band. At first, Patrick was incredulous. "How in the heck am I supposed to march?" he asked.

Patrick's father was committed to making it work, though. He said, "If Dr. Byrne's so impassioned about it and Patrick wants to do it, then—by golly—I'll give it my all as well." With that, the Hughes father/son team became full participants in the university's 214-member marching band. Patrick played the trumpet, while his father hurried him across the field in formation. Other band members helped Patrick's father whenever he fell out of step.

Mr. Hughes' participation in Patrick's college experience comes at extraordinary cost. Present at every band practice and all of Patrick's classes, Mr. Hughes works the graveyard shift for UPS. He leaves for work late in the evening, returns early the next morning, and after a few hours of sleep, begins Patrick's full college schedule. Patrick's

mom works full time to provide for their other children and takes care of all of Patrick's medical needs.

The Hughes family is happy to make the sacrifices. "He's my hero," Mr. Hughes says of his son. "What he goes through—it's taught me that I don't really have any complaints. I guess a father couldn't ask for anything more than the relationship I have with Patrick."

Patrick expresses the same incredible optimism. "God made me blind and unable to walk. Big deal! He gave the musical gifts I have and the great opportunity to meet new people."

In fact, Patrick considers his blindness a particular blessing. "I don't see the skin color," he says. "I don't see the hair length, I don't see the eye shape; I just see what's inside the person."

Brandon O'Brien, assistant editor, PreachingToday.com; sources: "Patrick Henry Hughes—Inspirational Story," www.youtube.com, and Erin Hayes, "Blind, Wheelchair-Bound Student Doesn't Fail to Inspire," www.abcnews.com (11-10-2006)

Author Ed Dobson wrote a book titled *The Year of Living Like Jesus*, in which he tells the story in diary form of how he tried to live as Jesus lived and as Jesus taught for a year. On day thirteen of month one, he records this story:

My wife and I drove to Key West. I decided to take a day off from reading. As we walked past a restaurant on Duvall Street, a man, who'd obviously been drinking, called from the steps: "Hey, could spare some change so I can get something to eat?" I've heard that line a lot, and I know a number of responses. First, you can simply ignore such people. After all, he will most likely use whatever money you give him to buy more alcohol, and, therefore, you'd be enabling his habit. Second, you can offer to take him to a restaurant to buy him something to eat. In most cases the person will not go because he mainly wants the money to buy alcohol. Third, you can point him to an organization that provides meals for the homeless. Many such organizations exist in most cities. What did my wife and I do? We walked past the man without doing anything, as we have done with so many other people over the years. After all, it's not our fault that he is where he is.

But after we'd walked on a little farther, he called after us, "Can you help a Vietnam vet?" My youngest son is a veteran, and I deeply respect those who have served their country in that way. So I stopped, walked back to him, and gave him a dollar. At that moment I remembered the words of Jesus: "Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you." It's as simple as that—give to the one who asks. He asked. I had an obligation to give.

As I walked down the street, a wonderful peace came over me because I felt I'd actually obeyed one of Jesus' teachings. I knew he'd probably use it to buy more alcohol and that I probably hadn't made the wisest choice. And I also knew that a dollar wasn't really going to help him. But I had no other choice. He asked and I was obligated.

Still, what caused me to give him the money was not really my responsibility to follow Jesus, but the fact that he was a veteran. So after my initial euphoria, I realized I had done the Jesus thing for the wrong reasons.

Ed Dobson, [The Year of Living Like Jesus](#) (Zondervan, 2010), pp. 24-25