

A different way of looking at spirituality

In Sydney, Australia, the major convention centre hosts an annual “Mind, Body, Spirit Festival.” It is subtitled “A celebration of spirituality.” But what is “spirituality”?

Now that you have looked at what the Bible says about the soul, as a group try to develop a definition of specifically *Christian* spirituality. What is it that makes spirituality distinctly Christian?

Spirituality

The following is a list of all the uses of the word SPIRITUAL (SPIRIT) in the New International Version (NIV), a popular version of the English Bible.

Rom. 1:11	1 Co. 1:7	Gal. 6:1	1 Pet. 2:2
Rom. 7:14	1 Co. 2:13	Eph. 1:3	1 Pet. 2:5
Rom. 12:1	1 Co. 2:15	Eph. 5:19	
Rom. 12:11	1 Co. 3:1	Eph. 6:12	
Rom. 15:27	1 Co. 9:11	Col. 1:9	
	1 Co. 10:3	Col. 3:16	
	1 Co. 10:4		
	1 Co. 12:1		
	1 Co. 14:1		
	1 Co. 14:12		
	1 Co. 14:37		
	1 Co. 15:44		
	1 Co. 15:46		

What are some simple preliminary observations you can make about the extent, frequency and prevalence of these verses?

If you are part of a group, then together develop a profile/identikit of the “spiritual” person. (The easiest way might be for everyone to take a verse or two and reflect on what information/orientation/perspective it contributes to the profile.)

Were there any surprises or frustrations in this exercise? Given the widespread use of the adjective ‘spiritual’ in Christianity, why aren’t there more references? If you took out the references in 1 Corinthians, what could you conclude?

A different way of understanding spirituality

The frequent use of “spiritual” with a lower case can obscure the connection that the word has with the Spirit of God. It is a major shift in perspective if in each of the verses listed above the translation “spiritual” is in fact “Spiritual”. In other words, a spiritual activity or person in the Bible is fundamentally a result of the Spirit of God.

Now, take one use of “spiritual” in each column and explore its context (section and book) to see if it is a result of the Spirit of God. (For instance, “spiritual seed” (1 Cor 9:11) must be interpreted in terms of the “seed” (1 Cor 3:6) planted by Paul, which he describes as “words taught by the Spirit” (1 Cor 2:13).

In Christian circles “spiritual” has been abused to mean religious (a spiritual person), non-material (the spiritual side), mystical (a spiritual insight) and the inner life of the believer or even elitist people. However, one of the finest NT scholars says

“God’s people have the Spirit, and are by that very fact ‘spiritual’ (Spirit-people), while others are not, nor can they be “spiritual” in any meaningful (for Paul) sense of that word, precisely because they lack the on thing necessary for spiritual life, the Spirit of the living God.”

(Gordon D. Fee, ‘Some Reflections of Pauline Spirituality,’ in *Alive to God Studies in Spirituality*, edited by J.I Packer & Loren Wilkinson, 96.)

If the Bible gives us our orientation then spirituality is in fact “Spirit-uality.”
What does this perspective do to your starting definition?