

SESSION 6

A WAY TO SERVE

Leader pages on pp. 152-155

THE POINT:
GOD HAS EMPOWERED
AND EQUIPPED US TO
SERVE HIS CHURCH.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-24

MEMORY VERSE

¹² For just as the body is one and has many parts, and all the parts of that body, though many, are one body — so also is Christ.

¹³ **For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free — and we were all given one Spirit to drink.**

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¹⁴ Indeed, the body is not one part but many.

¹⁵ If the foot should say, "Because I'm not a hand, I don't belong to the body," it is not for that reason any less a part of the body.

¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I'm not an eye, I don't belong to the body," it is not for that reason any less a part of the body.

¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?

¹⁸ But as it is, God has arranged each one of the parts in the body just as he wanted.

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¹⁹ And if they were all the same part, where would the body be?

²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" Or again, the head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you!"

²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that are weaker are indispensable. ²³ And those parts of the body that we consider less honorable, we clothe these with greater honor, and our unrespectable parts are treated with greater respect,

²⁴ which our respectable parts do not need. Instead, God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the less honorable.

KEYWORDS

So also is Christ (v. 12)—Paul used the imagery of a human body to express the truth that all Christians are parts of Christ's body, the church.

One Spirit to Drink (v.13)
Believers are not divided into different groups because they have all drunk from the same Spirit; the baptism of the Spirit that occurs at conversion.

Many Parts, One Body (v.20)
Individual members do not exist for themselves. Instead, they exist to serve one another in the church body.

God ...Body Together (v. 24)—Paul repeats the idea from v.18. This theological idea is not a mere abstraction. Instead, this truth provides rest and assurance—God is in control.

HOW ARE WE EMPOWERED AND EQUIPPED TO SERVE GOD'S CHURCH?

We like the image of the rugged individual. The guy who stands on his own two feet. The woman who built a successful business by working hard and persevering. It's what many believe made our country great, right? We love the stories of those who found opportunity and blazed their own trails: Daniel Boone, George Washington Carver, Amelia Earhart, Kehinde Wiley, and Dr. Mae Jemison. These individuals inspire us because they show what willpower and courage can accomplish.

Herbert Hoover coined the term "the rugged individual" during his 1928 presidential campaign, encouraging Americans to embrace the notion of rugged individualism and take care of themselves. In politics and business, rugged individualism can drive innovation, as seen in Madam C.J. Walker, who rose from poverty to become a self-made millionaire through hard work and persistence.

But rugged individualism fails miserably in the Christian life. As followers of Christ, we are not called to go it alone. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul paints a picture of the church as one body—the body of Christ. Each member has unique gifts, and God equips us to support one another. True strength comes from unity within the body of Christ.

We are One Body

// 1 Corinthians 12:12-13

Throughout this study from 1 Corinthians, we've seen that the church was divided into factions, but those factions weren't just over leadership; they also divided over spiritual gifts. It was as if they had made it a competition over who was more spiritual and had what they thought were better spiritual gifts. Paul began chapter 12 by acknowledging a variety of spiritual gifts, but those gifts, as varied as they were, came from the same Holy Spirit. "Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:4). Let's celebrate the variety of ways God works through individuals in the church, but let's never forget the source.

One word dominates verses 12–13: ONE. One Spirit. One body. One church, brought together by the Holy Spirit. "We are all baptized by one Spirit" is not a reference to a follow-up event in the believer's life. In referring to that moment we placed our faith and trust in Christ, we often say colloquially, "I asked Jesus into my heart." Jesus comes into our lives through the indwelling presence of His Spirit. The moment you are saved, His Spirit comes to live in you. A relationship with



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Christ and the presence of His Holy Spirit go hand in hand. “If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him” (Rom. 8:9).

Because the Holy Spirit lives in you and lives in me, there is a unity and spiritual reality that makes the church unique from other community groups or social clubs. The church founded on the gospel of Jesus Christ is different from any other collection of people. Consider what the church might look like to an outsider. Paul pointed to the diversity in the Corinthian church in terms of Jews and Greeks, slaves and free. While our diversity may not be identified by those same descriptors, we are still a unique collection! We are a gathering of teachers and nurses, city dwellers and country folks, introverts and extroverts, people of various cultures and traditions, coffee drinkers, and tea drinkers ... and on and on. All those differences fade in the light of what brings us together: a commitment to love and follow Jesus. And His Holy Spirit indwells each and every believer and brings us together into a singular body: His church.

Unity is different from uniformity. We don't have to do things the exact same way or have the exact same opinions, but the Spirit unites us around one mission and one purpose. Consider the music of a city's full-blown orchestra. Everyone—regardless of what they play—can play the exact same notes. It's still a song, but it may sound bland. However, if the instruments play different parts, adding harmonies and countermelodies, it becomes a much richer sound. There is a depth and beauty that simply playing in unison can't provide.

That beauty is only possible when each musician follows the same conductor. The conductor's role is to keep everyone on the same sheet of music, working as one, even as they play their respective parts, they goal is to sound as one.

HOW CAN WE FOSTER UNITY WHILE EMBRACING DIVERSITY IN THE BODY OF CHRIST?

We All have Our Specific Function

// 1 Corinthians 12:14-18

Paul didn't use the analogy of an orchestra to describe the church; he used a far better one: the physical body. Consider what our own physical bodies teach us about living and serving together as the body of Christ. Our bodies have 30 trillion cells that work in harmony. They even pulse together in the same rhythm, which is all the more amazing when we see how diverse those cells are. Chemically, cells are almost alike, but visually and functionally, they are very different. We are a bewildering zoo of cells—all kinds. Of course, not a single one of your cells resembles you, but when those 30 trillion cells are together, there's you! In the church, no



DIGGING DEEPER SPIRIT BAPTISM VS. WATER BAPTISM

“For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body.” 1 Corinthians 12:13 Paul is describing something much deeper, spiritual renewal, not the physical water baptism. There is a distinction between Spirit baptism and water baptism. Water baptism cannot accomplish what only the Holy Spirit can do, which is to make us part of God's family. Spirit baptism qualifies believers for water baptism. Some people are baptized in water but are not true believers, such as Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8:9-25). Others become true Christians but have not been baptized with water. The Holy Spirit changes our hearts and makes us new. This transformation is described as “rivers of living water” or being “washed clean.” When the Spirit makes us new, we belong to Jesus and His church. Water baptism is important, but the Holy Spirit does the life-changing work in our lives.³²

What role does water baptism play after Spirit baptism?

one of us fully resembles Christ, but when we come together—acting as one, serving together, and loving one another—the world sees Jesus. Here we are, an unlikely assortment of people, yet together we display Jesus to the world!

Don't think that because you are just one individual in the larger body of Christ, your role is insignificant. Each part of your physical body has great worth—and you, too, have great worth in the body of Christ. We each contribute, and without every part—including your part—the body of Christ doesn't function as it should. Paul stressed this in verses 15-18 with a humorous image of a foot feeling unimportant because it's not a hand, and an ear feeling unnecessary because it's not an eye. Every part of the body is vital to the health and function of the body—and you are too..

We can laugh at Paul's illustration and see how absurd (or horrific) a body full of hands and eyes would appear, but we can echo the words of the hand or ear in subtle ways.

- *Why can't I sing like she does?*
- *I tried to do what he does, but he'll always be more successful at it.*
- *Sure, if I could speak like he does, I could win others to Christ too.*

Feet trying to be hands is silly but so is trying to mimic someone else's gifting and ministry. Of course, we'd never say this out loud, but we sometimes suffer from spiritual gift envy.

Wanting someone else's role is quietly questioning God's wisdom in placing you where you are. He placed you where He did for this specific time and for a specific purpose. "God has arranged each one of the parts in the body just as he wanted." I'm sure that if we had the opportunity to walk in someone else's shoes for a short season, we'd find ourselves unfulfilled and ill at ease. Why? That's not our role within the body of Christ. Our greatest joy, fulfillment, and purpose come in serving where God has placed us with the gifts He has given us.

WHAT ARE THE DANGERS OF COMPARING OUR GIFTING TO OTHERS IN THE CHURCH?

We All have a Unique Value

// 1 Corinthians 12:19-24

Paul stressed again that we are many parts, but we make up one body, and we are to work in total cooperation with one another. Within our physical bodies, a wondrous cooperation occurs between the individual parts. Each cell—each and every cell—is flooded with communication about the whole body. For example, white blood cells are only about one percent of your total blood, but they play the key role of attacking outside invaders: viruses, bacteria, and any foreign invaders. They are continually cruising through your body looking for the riffraff that doesn't belong. But how does a roaming white blood cell know which cells to attack as invaders and which to welcome?



Among the 30 trillion cells in your body, there is an almost infallible sense of belonging. Your body can sense infinitesimal differences between a cell and an outsider. Even though your body is constantly making new cells, your body knows which cells belong and where.

The secret is your deoxyribonucleic acid—your DNA. DNA is a single molecule that contains your unique genetic code. It's amazing how God has structured our bodies so that, even though each cell contains the same DNA with all the information about every kind of cell, cells specialize and form different parts of the body. Within that body, no one is less important, and no one is more important. All have a role and purpose.

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There is no room in the church for the words uttered in verse 21 by the eye and head, “I don’t need you!” Paul wrote in terms of parts considered less honorable or unrespectable, but those parts deserve the same honor and respect. We take great care of our faces and hands, and we admire photos of beautiful faces—but few of us want to look at photos of someone’s liver. We give great importance to our hands and mouths while giving little thought to our internal organs, like the liver. However, if I had an accident with my table saw and lost a hand, I could still live and function (although I hope my wife would cut my food for me). But if my liver fails to function? I’m dead. From that perspective, which is more important?

Everyone had to adjust their lifestyle in the Spring of 2020. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, office workers switched to working from home. But not everyone had to stay home. Those who continued with their jobs as before were tagged as “essential workers.”

Every believer is an essential part of the body of Christ. Yet if we feel ourselves unnecessary or unwanted and choose to sit on the sidelines, we negatively impact the body of Christ.

HOW CAN WE HELP PEOPLE WHO WORK BEHIND THE SCENES IN THE CHURCH FEEL VALUED?

DID YOU KNOW?

Dr. Regina Benjamin, M.D., has dedicated her life to providing medical care for the community of Bayou La Batre, a shrimping village in Alabama. She founded the Bayou La Batre Rural Health Clinic in 1990, providing quality healthcare to everyone while charging what patients could afford. As founder and CEO of the clinic, Dr. Benjamin serves the underprivileged in this Gulf Coast fishing village. Her clinic was destroyed multiple times by hurricanes, yet she rebuilt each time. Dr. Benjamin became the first physician under the age of 40 and the first African American woman elected to the American Medical Association Board of Trustees. Later, she served as the 18th Surgeon General of the United States,³³ before returning to serve her fishing village. Through her commitment, Dr. Benjamin reveals that selfless service reflects God’s design, in which He empowers and equips us to stay focused on serving others.

Biblical Truth: God equips every believer with gifts to build up the church.

What specific gifts has God equipped you with to serve His church?

LIVE IT

God has empowered and equipped you to serve His church. How will you live out this truth?

God has equipped each of us with unique gifts and a Spirit-led sensitivity to recognize needs around us. That stirring in your heart when you see someone struggling, or feel compelled to help, is not a coincidence; it is often the Holy Spirit prompting you to act. Rather than waiting for formal invitations or perfect timing, faithful service sometimes means stepping up when you see genuine need. Your willingness to serve demonstrates trust that God will use your availability and equip you as you go.

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- **Be Alert to Spiritual Needs.** Pay attention to those who may be struggling emotionally and spiritually. Offer a listening ear, prayer, or encouragement, trusting the Spirit to guide your words.
- **Use Your Unique Gifts.** Identify your talents, skills, and experiences God has given you, and apply them where they can serve the church and bless others effectively.
- **Step In as a Leader.** Volunteer to lead small projects or assist in coordinating efforts, demonstrating humility and faithfulness in service. Don’t wait for someone else to take initiative.

DAILY READINGS

1. UNITY FOR ETERNITY// REVELATION 3:3

At times we may be tempted to shy away from people but consider it a gift to be part of the body of Christ while on earth. As one body we fellowship together and grow in our relationship with God and each other. We can love and serve one another. You may have heard the phrase; no church is perfect because we are in it. We have personal shortcomings and personal struggles with sin so we may disappoint each other along the way. But remember this is the practice run. We will be in the presence of God and experience perfect unity with Him and with each other for eternity.

Pursue unity as one body in Christ.

2. RECOGNIZING THE GIFTS IN OTHERS// ACTS 12:13-15

Rhoda was a servant at Mary, the mother of John's house. Inside the house, there was a gathering of people praying. The servant answered the door and excitedly announced that Peter was there but those gathered did not believe her and dismissed her. Eventually, they found out that it was Peter at the door. Their joy and amazement at seeing Peter was delayed because they dismissed the report from Rhoda. As believers gathered in the body of Christ, we should listen carefully and value to contributions from all parts of the body so that we do not miss the move of God among us.

Don't dismiss the contribution of others in the body of Christ.

3. TOO MUCH SAMENESS// 1 CORINTHIANS 12:19-20

We find comfort with people who are like us. It is easy to be around people with similar interests and hobbies. Having similar views and opinions, cuts down disagreements and controversy. So, we join groups where we find comfort with like-minded people. Paul uses the image of a body to demonstrate the problem of all being the same. What kind of body only has one part or says it does not need any other parts. All the parts of the body are indispensable. God has intentionally put

together the body with many members to make one body and we should seek the same in the body of Christ.

Respect, value, and enjoy the many members that God places in your church.

4. TEACH YOUR CHILDREN // DEUTERONOMY 6:5-7

One of the more challenging places in the church to get members to serve is in the children and youth ministries. It is easy for adults to become so focused on working with other adults that they neglect the important ministry to the younger population in the church. We are to love God, but we must also teach children and youth to love God by teaching them who He is. Ensuring our children love God, secures the future of our churches. Making sure that they love God based on a firm foundation of knowing who He is prepares them to grow into mature Christians ready to serve and lead. Lead by teaching the children in your home. If you don't have children of your own, commit to ensure the children of your church are taught well.

Do your part to teach children and young people about God's love.

5. TO SERVE JESUS LOVE OTHERS// MATTHEW 25:40

Being active in the church is wonderful. Joining committees and going to Bible study are important parts of the life of a believer. Extending forgiveness and loving our brothers and sisters in Christ is essential. However, in Matthew 25, Jesus calls believers out from the four walls of the church to care for the hungry, the stranger, the sick, and the imprisoned. Jesus goes as far as to say that this is how you show love to Him. Christ Himself declared, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45). Don't get so caught up in your church work and commitments inside the church that you forget to serve God in your community.

Look for daily opportunities to demonstrate God's love to those in need.