

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

August 14, 2022 "The Unique You: If I'm different, then how do I belong?"

I Intro.

Welcome to the weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from the message Sunday. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing, and you can use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. School has started back and we're heading into an exciting fall. Our children's area is expanding, and we've moved check-in into the lobby. We also have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can see all that through our newly upgraded app, and social media sites. We're so encouraged by your love and presence when you gather with us. A great group of familiar and new faces join us each Sunday. If you're joining us online, we appreciate your presence also. We are 100% committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family, and if there is anything you need, prayer, ideas or suggestions, please pass them our way. We know the future is still uncertain, but we are committed to making our virtual congregation as central to NCC as our in person group.

II Recap.

This is the second Sunday of our series in which we're learning about our uniqueness, and how God has intentionally designed this world to express all of the infiniteness of who he is and how we can celebrate and live fully into who we really are. We may feel isolated, or even 'less than', when we fall into the trap of comparing ourselves to the people around us. But if we can find the purpose in our divine uniqueness, and seek God and his anointing of who we are, then there is this place and purpose we can fulfill that will make our lives meaningful. But it all begins with accepting ourselves and all of who we are. And that is a journey of acceptance and discovery.

III Sunday.

What seemed like a natural next step in this journey of discovering who we are, and what our lives are to look like after we begin acknowledging and embracing our uniqueness, is finding a 'tribe', a group of people, we can journey with. Our natural tendency is to find people just like us. Same beliefs, preferences, and desires. The world kind of pushes us in this direction. But finding others just like us only limits and stifles our growth. And is simply not God's plan for community. This truth of celebrating uniqueness is what should make the church the most beautifully diverse place on earth. And it's often not. Dr. King was spot on when he said Sunday morning, the 11:00 hour, is the most segregated hour of the week.

So, we want to address this issue of belonging and how the church can and needs to overcome the draw of sameness. But first...some questions.

What was your church like growing up?

How did it deal with people who were different?

How have you changed how you see and interact with others?

The scripture used Sunday was a long one and was full of truths about the idea of belonging. Read all of **1 Corinthians 12** about spiritual gifts, and how they fit together, and then we'll walk through it.

What jumped out to you from this passage?

What did it say to you about how we fit together?

Did it address or undo any previous thoughts or opinions you had about belonging?

There were four things we highlighted from this passage about how belonging to something greater allows us, even encourages us, to embrace our uniqueness rather than suppress it.

1. Understanding our uniqueness grows our ability to find belonging. When we place God at the center of understanding of everyone's divine uniqueness then the focus comes off of us, and onto the lordship of God. Then we can avoid the curse of comparison. It's not whether we're better or have it more together than someone else. It's, all of us are flawed, and are held together not by our effort but by the loving compassionate nature of God.

How have you struggled or suffered because you compared yourself to someone else?

2. Our uniqueness is for the purpose of helping each other. If we were all the same. Had the same thoughts, beliefs, practices, preferences we wouldn't need each other. We are not an island, we are not independent. We are interdependent, and need each other. And it is in our uniqueness and understanding how we all benefit from each other, that true belonging happens.

How much are you willing to admit you are unable to do something and ask for help?

3. Our uniqueness is not just our abilities. It's all of who we are. Because of the church's discomfort with people who don't fit their 'ideal', this passage has been interpreted more about our skills and abilities than each of us as fully unique creations. Paul seems to have a very expansive view of our uniqueness. Every part of who we are; preferences, likes, dislikes, leanings, personality, wiring and more are central to understanding who we are, and how we belong together.

This is a place to be totally honest. **What type of people who are different from you do you sometimes struggle with? How have you tried to deal with it?**

4. We are to accept and affirm equity in our uniqueness. This is key in closing out the reading of this passage. Paul says out loud what we struggle to believe inside. And that is no matter how odd, or different someone may be, we cannot make a value judgment about whether that person belongs or not, because of how different they are. All of who we are is a part of God's plan and design to do good in this world, and we cannot label or call someone lesser or unnecessary.

Where have you changed your perspective or view of people not like you, and what did it take for you to be more accepting?

IV Challenge.

After all of this teaching about how we belong together in our uniqueness, Paul ends this explanation with a transition to what we have artificially labeled as the next chapter. But 1 Corinthians 13 is front and center to understanding what it means to belong. When Paul talks about the better, most excellent way, he's saying that in our understanding of uniqueness, of belonging, it has to be understood and practiced within the truth of this better way. Everything we do is framed and filled with practicing the idea of 'belonging'. Rather than making people 'fit in', or having to change into the idea we want them to be accepted. We accept them, you, just the way you are.

We were all created for connection, for community, to belong. Not just fit in by becoming like the people we want to do life with. But to actually be ourselves and be fully accepted.

What would it take for the church to build this kind of community where everyone can belong?