

At the height of World War II, as the sons of England fought the Axis powers, the nation's coal workers began to experience declining morale. As the nation was regaled with stories of heroism and sacrifice from the battlefield, the coal workers got up every morning, traveled to the mines, gathered coal all day, and went home. As time went on, they felt less and less like they were making a difference in the war, that they were having an impact, that they belonged. But in 1943, Winston Churchill addressed the coal workers, and delivered the following words.

**"We shall not fail, and then some day, when children ask, 'What did you do to win this inheritance for us and to make our name so respected among men?' one will say, 'I was a fighter pilot,' another will say, 'I was in the Submarine Service,' another: 'I marched with the Eighth Army; a fourth will say, 'None of us could have lived without the convoys and the Merchant Seaman; and you in your turn will say, with equal pride and with equal right: 'We cut the coal.'" -Winston Churchill**

Through those words, Churchill communicated to them what a vital role they played for their nation, and that their contribution was invaluable. They were not on the outside looking in. They were on the team, and their contribution, though not as visible and dramatic as a soldier on the frontlines was, nonetheless, indispensable to the cause. He reminded them of their value. He reminded them they mattered. He reminded them they belonged. They returned to their work with a newfound sense of purpose, confident in the impact they were having.

I believe many Christians today feel like the English coal miners. In a time of celebrity pastors, large church staffs, strategic plans and infrastructures, or super-Christians having a huge impact, and smoke machines, the average Christian often feels they have nothing to contribute, that they are not needed, or have no part to play, and often conclude that, in spite of their faith in Jesus, they don't belong.

We are continuing our series called *To Be Continued*, where we are looking at the New Testament images of the Church Jesus said he would build to know who we are, what we are called to do, and why we are called to do it, and to continue the work Jesus started on the day of Pentecost.

This morning we are going to look at maybe my favorite passage in all of Scripture. It is 1 Corinthians 12, where the Apostle Paul uses the image of a body to tell us who we are and how we've been gifted by God to accomplish what he calls us to. We're going to begin in v12, but in the first eleven verses, Paul writes about spiritual gifts. These gifts are a manifestation of the grace of God, given to the people of God, to accomplish the purpose of God. And starting in v12, Paul tells us how Jesus has assembled his Church, here called his body, to employ these gifts and continue the work of his church.

**[SLIDE: 1 Corinthians 12:12-13] <sup>12</sup> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup> For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.**

If you have any question of belonging, Paul addresses it here. Just like the human body has many different parts, each of those parts belong to a larger whole. The Church is the same way. Each of us are individuals, different members, but we all belong to the larger whole called the Body of Christ.

You are a member of the body because of the work of God. There is no room to boast because it is not based on your merit but on the finished work of Christ. The membership agreement is called the New Covenant. The initiation ceremony is the baptizing of the Holy Spirit. And the charter we've been issued by God is called the Great Commission. As we saw last week when we looked at the promise of Jesus and the day of Pentecost, the Church began when the Holy Spirit was given by God, whose work places us in Christ and in his Church. He unites us with all other believers, and dwells in us individually. If you hear nothing else this morning, hear that if you have said yes to Jesus, you have a fit and function in his body. You belong.

While this is a picture of unity, know that it's not a call to uniformity. Paul references Jews and Greeks, slaves and free, but he's not saying we stop being who we are individually. I can never stop being a handsome, charming, German, and this is not a call to lose your uniqueness. I placed myself on escalator duty over the last few weeks, partnering with Jan and Brenda and Dominique, and I marveled at how different each of us are. God has assembled this body with a great variety of ages, ethnicities, nationalities, backgrounds. It truly is a picture of heaven. God made you distinctly you to be a unified part of the whole body. It is not assimilation into the collective, but a diverse collection into one body. And that diversity is also in our gifting.

**[SLIDE: 1 Corinthians 12:14-20] <sup>14</sup> For the body does not consist of one member but of many. <sup>15</sup> If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>16</sup> And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? <sup>18</sup> But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. <sup>19</sup> If all were a single member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup> As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.**

While we are all unified in the one body of Christ, we are also individuals who have been gifted differently for different purposes. We are not all supposed to be the same.

Paul uses the example of the foot and ear saying they are not part of the body to address something that just isn't true. If you read the entire book of 1 Corinthians, you'll see this is a church divided. There are the haves and the have nots, separated by social status, and there is also a preference for certain spiritual gifts, creating a hierarchy. Paul is confronting both.

This church came out of pagan worship, and they still had a preference for more ecstatic expressions like speaking in tongues. This resulted in some thinking more highly of themselves than they ought to, and others thinking themselves less than, perceiving their gifts were inferior to others. They struggled with belonging. But Paul says, "You can't disqualify yourself." You're a believer in Jesus, you've been gifted by the Spirit. You have something to offer. You belong.

Not only is a diversity of gifts in the body preferable, it is necessary. See v17. If we had a church full of all the same gift, we'd not only be boring, we'd be incomplete and ineffective. Imagine a church full of Kurts. God help us! Other than being the most handsome church in history, we'd be a total mess. We'd get nothing done because we'd either be too busy talking and making jokes, or we'd spend all our time arguing about who's in charge.

The American evangelical church struggles with this issue. We have elevated the up front and out-front gifts like teaching and preaching, singing, and leading. When we do this, it creates a Sunday morning, pulpit-centric, performance-based, personality-driven culture, leaving many to say "Well, I can't do that, so I guess I don't have anything to contribute." If the impact of our church hinges on a 75-minute service on Sunday mornings, we will accomplish little for the Kingdom of God, and we will leave far too many Christians inactive in their faith.

I know some of you here struggle with the idea you have something to offer. It's ok if you are not gifted to be up front or out front, because there's something else that likely stirs your heart. Do you lose yourself in prayer? Are you the person people go to when they are hurting? Is your answer "yes" any time you get asked to help? Are you asked for counsel when someone is making a difficult decision? That's not an accident. Look again at v18. The God who made you and the God who saved you is the same God who gifted you and placed you in this body to complement the other gifts he's given, and to bless the other people he's placed in our body.

I also want you to see the encouragement in v18. I know the announcement of Jason leaving is a difficult one. It's not only sudden, it is tough to see our friend and brother go. But I want to encourage you this morning to say he's not the only one God has gifted to lead the way. Every Sunday, this platform is full of people who love the Lord and use their gift to lead us in worship. And we can know that, just like God has provided Jason to his new church, God has someone that he's working on bringing us. But I want to remind you again, it's not all about the person up front. Let's keep reading.

**[SLIDE: 1 Corinthians 12:21-26] <sup>21</sup> The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." Just like we can't disqualify ourselves from the body, we can't disqualify others. If we prefer one gift over others, we fail to benefit from them all. This next verse is one of the most encouraging in all of Scripture. <sup>22</sup> On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup> and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, <sup>24</sup> which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, <sup>25</sup> that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup> If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.**

Do you hear that? No matter how you are gifted, you are indispensable. It means you are vital to the cause of Christ and to his Church. As as the body, we are called to honor each other, particularly those who don't receive a lot of it. Look, the guy up front is going to get all the attention and honor just because the nature of his position. He doesn't need any more. But what about others? We are to go out of our way to honor them.

So this morning I celebrate Maria and Mel and David and Sam and Larry and Michael who keep this place looking good and running right. I thank God for Joan and Jennifer and Kaye who make sure we're properly stewarding our finances. I marvel at the over 200 volunteers make Sundays go: Guest Experiences team who use their gift of hospitality to make everyone feel welcome and make everyone has enough caffeine to stay awake during my sermon. Our shepherds and teachers in Children and Student Ministry who help raise our kids up in the faith, the merciful and compassionate members of our Care Team, who pray for you on Sunday mornings. I thank God for this guy **[SLIDE: Bonez pic]** This is what we at Fellowship call Bonez. I am grateful for Bonez and his audio/visual team, who sit in the dark recesses of our worship center, taking care of technical details so we have sound and light and we can broadcast our services online.

If all of us are necessary, no one of us is essential. When we begin to see each other as indispensable, gifted and assembled by the sovereign hand of God to fulfill the sovereign purpose of God, when we value all gifts rather than rank them, we will celebrate each other and be for each other. There will be no room for division. On the contrary, as our appreciation for each other grows, so will our care for one another.

**[SLIDE] Embark on a journey of discovery.** God made you on purpose, for a purpose, and he has gifted you to live that out. Very few of us get a direct revelation from God that spells that out completely. But he also doesn't leave us alone to figure it out for ourselves. We've been given his Holy Spirit, whom Jesus calls the Counselor. He has a word for you. Get quiet before him, ask him how's he's gifted you, and listen. He's given us his Word, and it includes lists of gifts. I would encourage you to read the first part of chapter 12 this week. You can also read Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4 to see lists of gifts. He's given us each other. One of the ways we "call each other" is to help identify and encourage one another to put to put our gifts to work. One of the great blessings we can give to each other is to say, "I see this in you." All of these resources come together in our Repurposed Training Experience. You'll have the opportunity to listen to God, engage his Word, and have others to walk along the journey with you.

**[SLIDE] Embrace the risk.** It takes courage to step into what you are discovering and try things out, because there's a chance you could fail. I remember the first time I preached. It was just after I went public with the belief God was calling me into vocational ministry, ultimately to lead a church. And a few of us realized my inclinations needed to be tested. I was put on the schedule to teach in our Men's Ministry one Wednesday morning. Now, I didn't know Gary Brandenburg well at the time, but I did know he was a tough critic. And as I was up front reviewing my notes beforehand, I saw him walk in the door and in my head I said, "Dear God, what have I done?" But I had to take the risk to know if this was how I was gifted. You want to know what passage I preached? 1 Corinthians 12.

There are some of you who know how you are gifted, and God is bearing fruit through those gifts. You can be a great example and encouragement to others. I also know there are some of you here this morning who have started to think about how you are gifted, and you are being stirred. It's time to take a chance, because when you do, regardless of outcome, you'll know God and yourself more, and you'll be closer to living in your gifts.

Listen, if you had a tool box full of tools but weren't clear about what each of the tools was intended for, you may have to just try them out to see. If you pick up a hammer, observe it's heavy and flat and long-handled, you may just get a sense it was made to whack something! But you've got to take it out of the toolbox to ever find out. Tools left in the tool box can never be understood and never make an impact. It's the same with our spiritual gifts. You may not be sure what yours are, but if you leave them idle, you'll never experience the impact God wants to make through you. It's time to take them out and see what they do.

**[SLIDE] Expect God to use you.** I've said this many times and I will continue to do so. God can do all this by himself, but he wants to use us. He's already on the move and wants you to join him. When we accept that, we can begin the journey of discovery and we can take a risk.

Aldo – pre-m class, baptism poster boy, LG leadership, photography

I want to tell you the story of one of our members, Aldo Olalde. You may not know his name, but you do know his face, **[SLIDE: Aldo pic]** since he was our super model for baptisms for most of the last year. This picture is the culmination of a long journey where Aldo experienced God and discovered who he made him to be. **[SLIDE: close Aldo pic]** I first met Aldo, along with his wife Cynthia, in a pre-marriage class Martha and I taught several years ago. Never, in all my teaching, has someone looked less enthused to be there. He barely even laughed at my jokes! But God has done some amazing work in the last several years. I asked Aldo to give me some highlights, and he emailed me a short book. It was amazing. And while I want to tell you his story, I actually want you to hear his words.

**[SLIDE: 1 Corinthians 12:27] <sup>27</sup> Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.**

That may sound like just a statement of fact, but it is a declaration of identity and a declaration of potential. If you are a follower of Christ, you are a member of his body. You have been gifted by God to make an impact for God. You have a vital role to play. You are indispensable. You belong.