

Where Do I Belong In The Church

by James Jennings

This sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing and utilizing the diverse spiritual gifts within the body of believers. It highlights the need for godly character, forgiveness, and personal actions that may seem small but are crucial for advancing God's program. The message encourages individuals to understand their significance in the church, to serve with humility, and to recognize the impact of their actions on the overall mission of God.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:18, Acts 9:36, Matthew 25:40, 1 Peter 3:1, Philippians 1:25

Topics: "Spiritual Gifts", "Humble Service"

Description

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Transcript

I was emailing Chad Thompson who's going to come and do our men's retreat in a month and a half. I thought I'd read what he mentioned. I mentioned I was heading out to Vegas asking for prayer and preaching.

He said, may the Lord help us both. I always take courage in knowing that the Lord Himself has determined to give His people pure spiritual milk and solid food. It's up to Him.

We can be a willful obstacle, but if we are seeking to help God's people with a pure heart, then whether they get a lot, a little, it's God's Word and His work. Not every message is life-changing, but still, we must be washed in the Word. Often, just the turn of a phrase is enough to make someone realize a truth in an entirely more correct way.

One sentence in a message can change a life forever. You just never know. The act of preaching, there's nothing quite like it.

And I'm going to actually quote him near the end of my message today and share something I heard of his recently that like he said, just restating a certain truth in another way can be radically impactful on a Christian's life. Let's pray. Father, Lord, I am so grateful that this is Your flock.

This is Your church. Lord, we're all just trying to do our part and be faithful to serve You. And Lord, at the end of the day, it really is up to You, meeting the deepest needs.

You use means and You use preaching. And Father, I pray You would, Lord, help our brother Chad when he comes, that You would make it very effectual. Lord, whatever he brings to us, just even hearing the way he responded there, Lord, it increases my own expectation that he sees these things in that way.

And so, Lord, You would give him words to help our church, Lord. And we're just grateful that You will. Pray You'd even use this message right now here to this flock.

Father, help this to be beneficial. Lord, be with the words of my mouth. We just commit this time to You, Lord.

We're looking to You. In Jesus' precious name, Amen. Amen.

Well, I wanted to just start with a follow-up question. If you remember my message from two weeks ago, I thought to myself, what if I went and had access to your review page for your spiritual Airbnb in the last two weeks? I wonder how many of you have given place for the devil. That's what I looked at two weeks ago.

And I hope since that time, since I was trying to stress the importance of having short accounts, that if we looked at the review page, we saw these are all the guests that you've allowed to have an impact on your heart, that one of those guests, as Paul says in Ephesians, it would not be giving opportunity for the devil. That thought I sought to communicate is something you've got to remember the rest of your Christian life. The Christian is a person who's trying to live in the realm of today and keep short accounts whenever we sin and offend one another.

So may God help us to continue to do that. But this morning, I want to consider a question I've heard countless times in the last 15 years. I mean, honestly, ever since I've been a Christian, this has been a question that I've heard come up.

This is a question that I myself have asked at different points. This is a question someone in my grace group, I think they've brought it up maybe three times for prayer for our whole grace group. And we're even going to find that Paul the Apostle, it seems, had a similar question that was being brought up at the church at Corinth.

And this question is this, where do I belong in the church? Where do I belong in the church? Where do I fit in? How many of you have heard that question? You've probably thought that question. And it's a really valid question to ask, right? Because what can really be at the root of someone asking this question? What's motivating it? What's motivating it often is the perspective that I've got one life to live, and I want to be the most fruitful for my King, and I want to be as effective as I can be for Christ. So it's coming out of a motive of just wanting to be a good steward of God's grace.

In many situations, that's the heart of the matter. You think about Paul saying in Colossians that he was struggling with all his energy that the Lord powerfully worked in him. Where do I put my energy? Where should I invest my time, my energy? Where do I fit in? Where do I belong? Others put it this way, I don't fit in at the church.

Or where do I fit in at the church? It makes you ask these questions. Why is it that they don't feel like they fit in? Maybe they're fitting in more than they realize and it's just a matter of wrong perception. Maybe they're really not fitting in.

If not, why? How do we get them to fit in? If they don't feel like they fit in. If you're here and you feel like you don't fit in, how do we get you to fit in? What does that look like? Where do I belong in the church? And so in this sermon, I'm just simply going to make an attempt to think on those statements. Where do I belong in the church? I feel like I don't fit in at the church.

And just ask myself, how would Paul answer the question? How would Paul face this question? Not necessarily how I would initially, but how would Paul confront, not confront, that's the wrong word. How would Paul communicate something to someone asking that question? And so before we look at Paul, I thought I'd ask you guys. How would you respond? Someone came to you and they said, I feel like I don't belong.

I feel like I don't fit in. What would you say? Say your answers out loud so I can hear you. Okay, why? So yeah, you're trying to get to the root.

That's a good question. I don't know what my gift is. How do I figure that out? What part of the body am I? Okay, what was something someone else said up here? I'm sorry.

How long have you been attending? Have you prayed about it? What are you doing to try to fit in? Yeah, that can be very valid. Anything else? What does it mean to fit in? Yeah, that's a good question. Yeah, what is your expectation of what it means to fit in? Right? That's a very valid question.

Because in my own life, there's certain things where, what am I supposed to, it's kind of like assurance of salvation. Someone says they have assurance of salvation. What does that feel like? I mean, I want the assurance you have.

I mean, there can be, there's certain things that are subjective that we have to think about. So no, those are, I'm not saying all those were good things. I didn't catch everything.

So I'm not endorsing everything that was said, but those are classic questions that would be asked. And those are valid. But let's turn to 1 Corinthians 12.

1 Corinthians 12. And you know, to Corinth, basically, there's a number of statements that they had written to Paul that we don't necessarily see, but he's responding to these believers there on multiple different matters. And he has different, he's dealing with different questions or assertions that these believers had.

And the fact is the believers back then are the same as you all today, not in the sense of culture, but in the sense of, guess what? You and I have the same Holy Spirit that they had back then. And so the same issues that you find here in the Corinthian church, it shouldn't be surprising that people back then were even thinking similar questions as well. So 1 Corinthians 12, verse 1. Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I don't want you to be uninformed.

It always helps, right? Kind of like someone said, you ask the person why or what does it look like? Well, Paul doesn't want Christians to be uninformed about certain matters. It helps to be informed. Verse 2, you know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to mute idols.

However, you were led. Therefore, I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says Jesus is accursed. And no one can say Jesus is Lord except in the Holy Spirit.

Now, there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of service, but the same Lord. And there are varieties of activities, but it's the same God Who empowers them all in everyone.

Verse 7, to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit, what for? For the common good. Verse 8, for to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom. To another, the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit.

To another, faith by the same Spirit. To another, gifts of healing by the one Spirit. To another, the works of miracles.

To another, prophecy. To another, the ability to distinguish between Spirits. To another, various kinds of tongues.

To another, the interpretation of tongues. Verse 11, all these are empowered by the one and the same Spirit. You've got seven times already.

Same Spirit Who apportions to each one individually as He wills. And I'll just add before I forget, I didn't ask Jenny to pick any of those psalms, but it stood out in that one psalm never ceased to praise. It said, have all their gifts affirmed in their right relation.

And that's something you're longing for as a Christian. Verse 12, 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. For in one Spirit we are all baptized into one body, Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

For the body does not consist of one member, but of many. Now look at verse 15. We're going to read this.

I never really saw this before, at least stood out in the way it has this past week as I've been trying to think about how would I answer someone who has that question of I don't feel like I belong. Verse 15, if the foot should say, because I'm not a hand, I do not belong to the body. See, similar phrase.

That would not make it, the hand, any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, because I'm not an eye, I do not belong to the body, that would not make it any less a part of the body. 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? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them as He chose.

If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you, nor again to the head to the feet, I have no need of you. On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are actually indispensable.

And on those parts of the body that we think are less honorable, we bestow the greater honor. And our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

If one member suffers, all suffer together. If one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers and miracles and gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess the gift of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the higher gifts, and I will show you still a more excellent way." And he goes into a great chapter dealing with love. Now, like I said, I've read this more times than I can count, but it never really stood out to me the way it did right there.

So Paul to me, it seems, Paul in his response to them by stating what he says indicates that similar feelings were felt by some at Corinth. There were people at Corinthians, maybe the person in my grace group or maybe other people who were feeling the same thing. They were saying the exact same question.

2,000 years ago, where do I belong? Where do I belong? Now, they were going a step further than actually saying where do I belong. They weren't asking where do I belong. It seems like they were actually stating.

They were actually stating right there that they don't belong. So they weren't just inquiring about where do I belong. They were actually saying, I don't belong to the body.

You see, there's a difference between someone asking where do I fit in and someone who gets to the point where they say, I don't belong to the body. I don't fit in at all. That's a step further.

So Paul pictures those at Corinth. If you don't know this, if you're new to the faith, he pictures it in this imagery of an actual body. He's picturing believers like a body.

And he's speaking to them about when they come together. He mentioned right there in the church. He's writing this to a church.

And he's saying this. And here you've got people saying I do not belong in the body. At least they feel like that.

And so, I'm asking the question, what would Paul's response be? Not what you guys said. Not what I think. What would Paul say if you have someone asking a very similar question? And I'm not saying that Paul, depending on who's asking the question, might not have a different answer than what he does right here.

There's obviously situations and what's happening at Corinth is different. But look at his answer right there. 1 Corinthians 12, verse 15, it's the foot should say, because I'm not a hand.

Okay, I do not belong to the body. So what's happening? What's causing the individual here to feel like they don't belong in the body? Yeah, comparison. That could be a good word.

Looking at how God's designed someone else, and maybe it's not something, a part of the body that's with more modesty and less attention and it's covered, but they've got something that's a lot more outward. Their ability is a lot more outward and it looks like that's whatever, getting more attention or something. And they're at a point where they're discontent with them not being designed by God in that way.

Because I'm not a hand, meaning I'm not gifted differently than I am. So you basically have a foot desiring to be a hand. That's what you have.

You've got a foot. They want to be a hand. Can that ever change? In the Bible, can the foot ever become a hand? Yeah, you don't really have abundant reason.

You do find that when you're pointing men into the eldership and the laying of hands, there can be the giving of spiritual gifts. So there is a biblical point there that there are people who might not have a gift at some point, and later, maybe it just starts to mature, or later, it really is given by the Spirit. Right? God actually gives them that gift.

So, it seems like this member wants to have a different function in the life of the church. So rather than fully serving the way it was designed, it tries to be something it is not. And just to clarify, I'm not saying that's the reason behind any one person in my grace group or any other people who've made such a statement to me.

I'm just wanting to look biblically as I'm hearing this question, I'm asking myself, what would Paul say? And this is what I'm running into here, so that's absolutely worth consideration. Now, I'd ask you this, does he anywhere else bring up another reason? I realize we're only giving the letters we're given in the New Testament based on the issues that are happening in the churches, right? A lot of this is corrective. So if you have a church that doesn't have certain errors, you're not going to get certain responses from Paul.

You can't change that. But I was trying to think, does anywhere else he bring up another reason other than this? Like pointing something out to someone who's saying I don't fit in. I couldn't think of another place.

If you guys can think of another place, let me know. In Paul's statement, it maybe even reveals the person could have a sense of self-pity over this, right? If I would have been this or I could do this, I would belong. And rather than that's one of our struggles, we have to make sure our identity is not wrapped up in the way by which we serve, right? And that is so much easier said than done.

Because your identity can be wrapped up in the way you serve. And if that's taken away from you, you're in trouble. If you remember a year and a half ago, the sermon on do not rejoice in this, that the demons are cast out in your name, but rejoice your name is written in heaven.

Our primary joy has got to be in the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet with that said, that doesn't mean we just say, okay, it doesn't matter how I pour my energy out. It absolutely does matter.

You want to be a good steward of the one life you have, right? You want to find where you fit and be used to serve the body in that way to be effective, right? You want to be a good steward. What happens to the steward who goes and buries the talents? Wouldn't it turn out well for them? The master was angry with them. And so there's a right zeal to long to serve in whatever way God has designed you.

I don't want to at all be dismissive of that. That is right. That more people should have that perspective of wanting to be a good steward of the gifts of God in their life.

But how does Paul correct this thinking? I mean, by basically saying, just because someone's different doesn't in any way mean you don't fit in, right? He's affirming to them the diversity in the body is actually God's design, right? If you look what he says, that the foot should say I'm not a hand. So my conclusion by not being a hand is I don't really belong to the body. I got to be a hand to belong to the body.

Paul says, no, no, that would not make it any less a part of the body. You're not less part of the body because you're not designed in this specific way and able to do this specific thing, right? I mean, Paul's wanting to correct that to show them the body has a need for you. Rather than changing into something that God's not designed you for, the body actually needs you just as you are.

So this really is an identity crisis here that's happening. Brethren, I mean, if we're honest, that can be something we absolutely, some of you, we struggle with that. Am I in the right place? Right, you want to be in the right place where God wants you to be because you want to please the One who loved you and bought you.

And I trust here that you realize with the imagery how problematic it would be for the foot to try to be a hand. Do you realize how problematic that would be? If that tried to happen, number one, what's going to happen if the foot tries to be a hand? What's going to happen to the rest of the members of the body? I mean, the foot is really supporting the body as it's walking. So if the foot tries to be the hand, then you're really going to have a limp, could lead you to fall over, and you know what else might start to happen? The other foot is going to start thinking, maybe I'm a hand too.

Then you've got two feet thinking they're supposed to be hands, and then what happens? The whole body falls on the ground. Like Dagon, and has fell before. A lot of stuff's going to get dropped.

The whole body's going to be wobbling around. Others are going to be affected, right? I mean, that's why he uses such intimate imagery. It affects the body, right? It affects you.

It does, and we all feel this in a real intimate way if you're married, right? If I sin against my wife and there's something between my wife and I, it affects my walk with Christ. Right? So same thing with a body of Christians. Now, you may say my problem is I don't know what part of the body I am.

Am I a kidney? Am I a foot? Am I a hand? I can't be content with my spiritual gifting if I don't know what it is. And I agree. I sympathize with that.

I sympathize with that. Why would the foot think this way? Why would the foot think this way? Because I am not a hand. I do not belong to the body.

If you're the foot and you're starting to think that way, what could be causing that to happen? I mean, I already hit on some of it maybe. There's some identity crisis here, but think of these things. Number one, it could be the culture in the church.

What do I mean by that? There's certain churches, what do they do? A certain type of gift without them recognizing, that really gets exalted. A lot of churches, that kind of happens with the missionaries. It's like you've got to be a missionary.

Those are the real spiritual people. Constantly, you see that even in the Southern Baptist Convention where it's like the missionaries come home and it's like they're a different breed of people. Not that in some ways they aren't.

There is a difference there, but it's God designed it, right? They're as useful doing what they're doing as the member in the body who's back here just giving and supporting them to go out there on the field. But there can be a certain type of culture in the church that can cause this to permeate people's minds. And honestly, this seems to be the issue at Corinth, right? What was the thing at Corinthians that you wanted?

Yeah, speaking in tongues.

There was something there in that church. If you didn't have it, you didn't feel as superior, right? You want the gift. That's what they fell into here.

And I remember hearing a brother, he's not in our church, but he used to serve as one of the pastors in another church in another city. And he expressed to me, when he stepped down from doing that, he was so free because his whole Christian life there, it was like idolizing the ministry. You got to become an elder.

You got to become a pastor in the church. It's like that was the end goal. And when he did that prematurely in the wrong way, it drastically affected his family in a negative way.

There's this pressure there. And doesn't mean he might not one day be able to serve like that in a season of his life, but he got put into the situation prematurely. It's kind of like Paul saying, one of the elder qualifications is you don't put a novice in.

There are people with gift, but they need growth and proven character to know where they're at before you put them in certain situations. So what if God designed you as a part of the body that people think is less honorable? Are you okay with that? Are you okay with that? You can say, well, James, you're the one up here speaking. I mean, would you be okay with it? You know, I hope I would.

I mean, I just, I'm like you. I want to be faithful to Christ. Whatever that looks like.

15 years as a Christian, I'm just trying to do the next right thing. Whatever that is. What's the next right thing to honor God? That's what I'm seeking to do every day.

By God's grace. Notice what Paul says, 1 Corinthians 12, 23. On those parts of the body, I like how he puts it.

On those parts of the body, look, that we think less honorable. What's he admitting there? Yeah, that people think that way. I mean, he's saying those at Corinth, you guys think this way.

You look around and you say, that's not as good of a spiritual gift as this person over here. I mean, it's like he's admitting you guys categorize. Well, I mean, don't we have to categorize, Paul, if we're going to figure out what we're called to do? Sure, but don't take it too far.

Is it right to encourage those who labor in ways that seem small? Yeah. I mean, think one question to ask yourself. Someone you know in the church who labors in a way that it might be a far more modest thing that's not as well known or whatever.

You have the ability with your words not to flatter them, but to give a word of encouragement. I mean, that's something to think about today. Who here has served you in some way that seems lesser? It's not, right? If that doesn't happen, the body doesn't function.

You should seek to encourage them and to build them up with your words. That's the loving thing to do. And I was even thinking recently, you know, there's talk about getting the laptop for the young girl in Lebanon.

I mean, think of that young girl in Lebanon investing her time and energy at such a young age into translating all these Spurgeon sermons into Arabic. It's not a small thing, right? Only eternity is going to see what impact all that truth has upon the souls of people. Even think about Paul, how he describes the older widows in 1 Timothy 5. He describes these women as this.

If she has brought up children, that's a big deal. I mean, I don't follow Elon Musk, but somehow I saw in the news, this lost billionaire made a comment recently about how important of a job being a mother is. Okay? Even he sees it.

I mean, a lost billionaire puts on Twitter something about how important a job of a mother is. I mean, is that obvious? Paul puts, she brought up children. I realize some of you long for children and God hasn't given them to you.

But even there, there's a purpose. She's shown hospitality. She's washed the feet of saints.

She's cared for the afflicted. She's devoted herself to every good work. That is an incredible repertoire of someone who's been faithful.

And all those saints, honestly, you could look at that and say, well, I mean, that's not big stuff. That is big stuff. Imagine you remove all that from the body.

No one to care for the afflicted. No one showing hospitality. No one washing the feet of saints.

And no one bringing up children. I mean, what would the body look like if you rip all of that out? I would not want to see that. That's going to be a monstrosity of a body if you lose all of that.

Well, here's a second thing. Another reason why the foot feels he does not belong. Nowadays, we're often faced with the view that the ministry in the church is limited to who? The pastors in the church.

And I don't believe that's an issue in our church, but a lot of churches, that's a problem. But the role of the pastors, as Paul says in Ephesians, is to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, right? You all are going and doing the work of the ministry. You are going and being the hands and the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But this mindset, it can prevent the body from serving as they are able since they all kind of look to the leaders to do it all. And then the leaders feel like everyone's looking to us, so I guess we better just go do it all. And then the body's not using their gifts.

And you can end up with like a one-man show type of mentality. And that ends up being very unhelpful and everyone's not going to be to their maxed fruitfulness. A third thing on why the foot doesn't feel like he belongs.

Maybe he's not actually a foot. Right? That might be why. Maybe he was wrongly identified.

You know, early on, it looked like a foot. It was actually a hand. We got it wrong.

It wasn't a foot. It was a hand. And he feels awkward because he indeed is not doing what he should be doing.

And so you know what? That makes me feel the weight of discernment of us church leaders to really help you all to see how God has designed you. That's a weighty thing. That's not a small reality.

It's not like, you know, you don't feel the weight of that. We want you all to be to the maxed fruitfulness in the kingdom of Christ. Right? We desire that greatly.

And so we need discernment. How am I going to correctly get identified? Notice how Paul says in verse 18, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them as He chose. So we don't give spiritual gifts.

God gave that. Part of our job is just to identify it. Now, here a question is, does Paul make it sound difficult in the Bible to know what your spiritual gifting is? Think of everything Paul's written.

Does he ever deal with someone wondering what their spiritual gifting is? In Paul's mind, is that a difficult thing to recognize? I mean, I was asking myself that question. I couldn't think of somewhere where Paul makes it sound difficult, which I guess it's interesting to me, because if I asked myself, well, how do I recognize who you all are and how God's designed you? If that was so difficult as we often perceive, then wouldn't you assume that Paul maybe would have dealt with that in some specific way? He does talk about Timothy being a man of proven worth, but that seems like it's more of a character type of thing. He does talk about testing, right? Even those who prophesy don't despise it, but test everything, but that's more about what they're saying, the content, than it is whether they have the gift.

And why doesn't Paul deal with how to figure out your spiritual gifts? Why doesn't he deal with that? So this to me makes it seem like struggling to identify spiritual gifts in a person's life was not an issue for the apostle there and for those at Corinth. Rather, he focuses in on the abuse of different gifts. So I think maybe Paul would agree with the sentiment that, and this is what we've repeated year after year in our church, that whatever God has designed you to do, you will naturally do, and the body will identify and see that in you, right? If you just give yourself to serve the saints, however God has designed you, people will be helped in that way, and that will be one of the evidences and assurances that you're really gifted by God to be doing exactly what you're doing, right? The body's just going to see it.

It's not something forced. Now I don't say that and want to minimize the importance of administration, right? He talks about even someone with that ability right there in verse 28, helping, administrating. And so us pastors are trying to help you all be most effective with the way God has designed you.

And I was thinking about someone who's an interior designer, right? I mean, they go into the house, they got all this furniture, they're trying to get it all in the right place. And if you walked in there and saw the couch being mounted to the wall, who's going to use that? I mean, I guess if the couch goes like this, you could lay on top of the back of the couch. It's going to be very unhelpful.

Think, when it comes to testing men to see if they have a teaching gift, your question is, since 2015, how many men have stood in this pulpit in the 10 a.m. and that we've tested their gifts? Guess. Who said 40? Oh, okay, I thought it was y'all and y'all don't even come here. Not including us elders, we've had 31 different men within this church stand in this pulpit during the 10 a.m. hour.

That honestly surprised me. 31 different men. And this, you guys know it, this is driven by a desire to identify gifts that those gifts might be used.

And I'm not saying it's always easy, but our longing is to see you all effective for Christ's kingdom. And there are times it can be very difficult and we're uncertain and I'm not here to say that we're perfect in recognizing what God is doing in your life. That's part of the humbling reality of need for you all to help us.

Is there risk involved? Have we made risk as a church? Yeah, I mean, that's part of the Christian life. You're making risks. There's a right amount of safety and then there's a right amount of risk.

But think about, here are three examples that most of you were not even here to know about, but of people who were wrongly identified. Wrongly identified. In the very beginning of the church, the second pastor appointed ended up not really having a gift to teach.

This all happened right before I came to the church 15 years ago. Tim said this went on for years. Tim and him would rotate 50-50.

He was appointed in the eldership and it became evident people weren't getting help. People weren't getting fed. There wasn't an ability to teach.

It became a burden. The guy was a great brother. The guy was very helpful in many different ways.

Eventually, it all came to a head. They had to communicate that to him. He didn't agree with the body's assessment.

And in a gracious way, he left the church and went on elsewhere. So that happened. And here a quote I heard from a preacher that I thought was helpful.

If a person cannot succeed in the ministry they believe God has designed them to do, in the church where everyone knows them best, then that should be an indicator. So if there's something in your life you think God's designed you to do, and if the church isn't seeing that, that's something to consider. There might be the gift, but there might be other areas of growth needed prior to using the gift.

A second thing, we sent and supported a missionary family in Texas to plant a church. Sadly, he was doing what he was not designed to do. Nothing progressed.

Eventually, the elders at that time had to tell him so. And that was very difficult for them. And then one other example, we sent two couples to South America maybe 14 years ago.

One was young, zealous. They got to know each other here while in San Antonio. Sadly, they get down there.

Conflict arose. They couldn't work together despite seeming to be so close within the church. The gifts were there in both of them.

But it seems in one of them, the character was not there. They couldn't walk together. They couldn't serve together.

So you see, identifying people and then putting them in a place, it's a serious thing. Because we have examples that I've witnessed firsthand that have caused pain where we did things prematurely. Yet, that doesn't mean we shouldn't take risk for Christ's Kingdom.

There is risk. I remember Serene Prodon from HeartCry when he was at my house. He just went through list after list of all these people they ended up supporting and there were problems with them.

And they had to axe those guys. That's far more difficult. You really want to feel sympathetic for HeartCry because they're trying to help people in another land.

Right? You want to get to know someone. It's a lot more difficult in that way. Now I could, on the flip side, have examples of positive identifications of gifts in the body where we risked it even in putting someone in some type of situation.

One of the first things I saw when I came to this church was we had two young single women that got sent over to India. And you know what happened? They're over there in India in this orphanage and they end up finding out that the guy over there is crooked. And eventually, all this thing gets exposed.

And some of those girls in that orphanage are the young women now who are in Nepal. If that didn't happen, if those two single women didn't get sent over there to India, that might never have happened. You see, God works in these different ways.

There's far more positive examples that I could give. But all this brings up this question. Are we willing to be weighed? And I don't mean a scale on the ground.

I mean our gifts. Our gifts. 1 Corinthians 14.29 Let the others weigh what is said.

You speak? I'm speaking right now. Especially the other teachers in the church. They're weighing what I say.

They're weighing what I'm trying to communicate. That's right. I realize you can't like Tim dealt with a year ago.

You can be way too hypercritical in that. Your Berean spirit can become a critical spirit and you just look at everything in a negative light. That's unhelpful.

I'm not encouraging that. But I might think in the physical realm I weigh 175 like I did in my Grace House years. The reality is I don't weigh that anymore.

Same thing can happen spiritually. Just like in the physical, you might not assess your weight correctly. Same thing happens in the spiritual.

So we need others to weigh what we've said. It also makes you ask this, am I willing to be limited? Do you know the limit that the Lord has given you in the areas of your gift? And if there's a limit, which there is, who put the limit there? God. Right? It's designed by the Lord.

And brethren, all of this should cause you to pray for us elders, please, that we would lead and manage well because we want none of you ineffective for Christ's kingdom. We don't want someone ineffective by putting them in a position they should not be or by not putting them in a position that they should be. Those things weigh heavy on our minds.

It might not be communicated often, but that is a very big reality, even just some of the examples in our own church's history. I trust you recognize the weightiness. People's lives can be affected in a negative way or in a positive way based on certain decisions that are made.

At the same time, I'd say this, don't assume you know what we're thinking. Don't assume we know what you're thinking either. Look, there are the guys, they come to church and like the first two weeks in, they're like, I want to be a preacher, I'm the next Paul Washer or something like that.

And yeah, you look at that and you're like, you're about to be humbled by God of the pride. But you hear that and you think, oh, I never should communicate anything. I mean, if you get some sense in your life about something that God's working in you, or you feel like maybe I could belong in a certain way, there's nothing wrong with humbly expressing that desire or that expectation.

So one answer to someone who says where do I belong, I would say this, where do you think you belong? Foot, hand, leg? What are you? What do you think? What do you think is happening in your life? And look at the question Paul says in v. 17. Basically, he's asking where would the body be without me? If the 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? I think one of the questions to ask is rather than where do I belong, unless you really don't know, but if you've already seen where you belong, you should step back and realize where's the body going to be without me, right? Josh and Tia are about to take off overseas and be gone at least six months. Where's the body going to be without them? What are they? What are they doing in your lives? What are you going to miss about them and the impact they're having on you? Where will the body be without me? I mean, that's something we should ask ourselves.

Rather than I don't belong because I'm an ear, rather because I'm an ear, if I leave, who's not going to be able to hear clearly without me being here? You see? And you know, someone views something as a lesser gift and they say they do not belong to the body, and you know what, when the body loses that sense, you'll all of a sudden recognize you were not some lesser gift. You know, we often don't recognize how much we're actually being used in the life of the body in the church. So Paul, in a way, is disallowing you to say these things about yourself or others.

He's saying you can't say you're not necessary. I don't think you're necessary. Are you necessary? He said no.

All are necessary. Every one of you. No one is unnecessary.

You all are essential to the body. I mean, where would the body be without you? So you've got to put your feelings aside and realize God's made me in a certain way. Can your feelings put you outside the body? I don't feel like I'm a part of the body.

If you're a Christian here, does that make you no longer a part of the body? No, it doesn't. You can feel it all day. But it's not reality.

It's not reality. And I'd even say this, you stepping back from your role of serving, and I'm thinking specifically about our brother in Austin who's just stepped down from pastoring up there, does that mean his opportunity to serve that church in another way has all of a sudden ended? No. It hasn't ended.

The body still needs him, even though a role change has happened. But what happens? Often people leave a church after their ministry opportunity ends, right? And this really impacted me and made me search my own heart. Years ago at the fellowship conference, Paul Washer spoke to all of the pastors, and he made this comment.

He said, any Christian can say they love the church, but we need to remember that there's a difference between loving your church and loving your ministry in the church. You got to hear this. There's a difference between loving your church and loving your ministry in the church.

Do you love your church because you love God's people and want to serve them in any way that God equips you? Or is your love only a pretense because you're really wanting to use them to elevate your ministry? Right? And we know the obvious examples out there of certain people doing this, but there can be a subtle way this happens. That was very heart-searching in my own soul when I heard that two years ago. And we should.

We should feel the weight of searching our own heart, kind of like I brought up two weeks ago, having short accounts before God. All right, who's the designer of all of this? God, right? 1218, God arranged the members in the body, each one as He chose. And who does He put forth as an example of this working together as a body? I mean, if you look, He's even talking about the same Spirit, the same Lord, the same God.

I mean, you think about the Trinity. The Trinity itself, you've got the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit all working together. And yet, interestingly enough, all equal, but different in design, right? Same thing in marriage.

You've got a husband and wife. They're one. We're working together as a team.

And so we see this great example in the Lord. In the Lord. So, it is disquieting to your own soul if you consider others less important than yourself, right? If you have any type of thought like that, that should bother you, because that will destroy unity.

Gordon Fee, he made this comment, there can be little question that the disquieting desire on the part of many to be something in the body other than what they are is a plague on our house. Right? And again, the imagery makes it clear. If I'm not a hand, I'm a foot.

It will affect the body in a negative way by me trying to be that which God has not designed me to be. Yet, it's disquieting to my own soul if the reason you feel you don't belong is because we're suppressing using the very gifts God is giving you, assuming those gifts are there. That would disquiet my own soul as well.

Then the body is not getting helped as they should. All right, I'm almost done here. I feel like these things are important to think about, brethren.

We can't live on an isolated island. Paul says in 1221, you cannot say I have no need of you. So reverse the statement.

I have need of you. I have need of your specific gift. Brethren, every one of you can be used of God to make some sort of impact on my life, and I need you to do that.

I need you. However it is, whatever way it is, whatever it looks like, I don't have all that figured out, but you know what? Paul makes me realize I need all of you and all of you can help and make an impact on my life, and you should be thinking the same thing about all the other members in the body. You can't say I have no need of you.

I need everyone. I can't function to my max ability without the help of the body. But it seems to me I'm not doing anything.

Look at Paul. 1 Corinthians 12. The parts of the body that seem to be weaker.

Don't you love how he adds the word seem in there? Brethren, just because something seems like a certain way doesn't mean it really is that way. It seems I'm not doing anything. They seem to be weaker.

That doesn't mean it's true. It doesn't mean it's true at all. What does Paul say? You're indispensable.

You're essential. You're necessary. Many believers, many of you are doing far more than you even recognize, and I would encourage you to keep doing the very things you're doing, even if I can't make a direct list of all the ways that you're having an impact on this body.

Don't believe the lie that it's not necessary. You're making an impact. But are you following Paul's logic? You're not less a part of the body because how God has designed you.

Without you, where would the body be? And you can't say I have no need of you to any member. Paul is really emphasizing this logic. So those who may appear superior and gift to you, Paul says, no, no, no, don't let that bother you.

They can't say to you who seem to be inferior that I have no need of you. Every one in this body has something to offer me. And I've shared this before, but one thing I appreciate about Bethany's dad, after he died, I was asking her mom, what's something that impacted you about Bob? And she said, Bob believed every Christian had something to offer him to help him further to become like Christ.

And so he approached every relationship like that. He believed they had something they can offer me. And I'd say that idea is rooted in 1 Corinthians 12.

So if you feel like you're doing nothing, I would say this, maybe you are doing nothing. Maybe you're at arm's length from the brethren. You're not intentional in your relationship.

You slip in and out of the services. You're not fellowshiping. You're not vulnerable with others.

When you're talking to them, you're holding all these things back because you're worried about how you're going to appear to them and are we going to reject you or accept you or what's going to happen? Maybe you're not looking for opportunities to serve in the small ways. Maybe others rarely come to your house. Or maybe you've got a tight-knit group of people you enjoy being with, but you're not branching out and you just have this little group and others are not benefiting from your gifts.

Only a select few of people are. We want to be able to say like Paul in 2 Corinthians 6, our heart is wide open. You're not restricted by us, but you are restricting yourself by your own affections, right? If anyone's going to be far off, don't let it be you.

Let it be another individual. So a second thing. Maybe you're doing far more than you realize.

I already mentioned this, but I think because of the tendency to pride in recognition, often God has blinded people from seeing the impact that they're making. So don't fall into self-pity. You thank the Lord that the work you're doing will not be overlooked.

Look, where do we see that? Where do we see people doing things and serving and they don't even recognize it? Judgment Day. Matthew 25, then they will answer saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry? When did I do that? It's kind of like me looking at my guestbook a couple years ago and it's like, I had a Korean family spend the night. Who were they? I didn't even remember who they were.

You don't want to not remember because you have a bad memory. But it's the point that we're serving in so many ways we don't recognize it. And think of this.

This is someone talking about having the actual loss of a limb through amputation. Having an amputation can have a considerable psychological impact for three reasons. You have to cope with the loss of sensation from your amputated limb.

You have to cope with the loss of function from your amputated limb and your sense of body image and other people's perception of your body image has changed. So these two are going to be amputated from us. Who's going to feel it? You're going to be limping around.

Where's Josh? Loss of function. Huh, I don't function as well as I did. I didn't realize how much they were having an impact on my functioning in the body.

Isn't that the case, right? You feel the loss of function. And you know what? We've seen it as a church. When the Lord has relocated certain people, you feel it, right? You feel it and you should.

But you know what? What happens time and time again? When the Lord relocates people, what does He do? If He takes your leg away, what's He going to give you back? They're not a prosthetic. He's going to give you another real leg, right? Because whose church is this? The Lord's. He is very concerned about our health as a body.

I even thought today about Prisca and Aquila. You know, the Lord relocating them because all the Jews had to leave the city. I mean, the providences of God happen like that.

How do you bring this closeness about? You want to be close with the body? Remember what Paul said there? If one member suffers, what happens? All suffer together. And it's interesting to me that recently I heard from two newer couples that they recently feel very close to the body and the brethren. What do you think brought that about? You all coming and suffering with them in the midst of their suffering.

And that brought them right in and got their hearts more knit together as a body. You see that little act right there and all of a sudden there's a closeness that wasn't there before. And yet what might keep us from that? Being distant, right? Not walking through our trial with believers in this church.

How do we bring this all about? We really need to seek to serve the needs of others. Diversity is good, right? This isn't about uniformity. Diversity is essential for the health of a church.

And I know I'm running out of time, but one thing that hit me from Hebrews 6, just hear this verse, for God is not unjust to overlook your work. Hear that? The love that you have shown for His name. That's the motivating factor in serving the saints.

And then what's He say next? As you still do, right? We're looking at that James Wednesday night. That's when I saw that verse. Before Grace Group, that's interesting.

Serving the saints as you still do. Not you used to serve the saints. You're still doing this.

We have a God who's not going to overlook your work. People might overlook you. Who cares? Who are you living for? People or God? The Lord, right? An audience of one on that final day.

And so what motivates them to love? They want it to be shown for His name, right? The glory of God. And you still do this. And so brethren, you think about serving the saints the way that you guys serve the saints.

I can't help but bring in Dorcas into this discussion, right? Upon her death, the members of the church had that body member cut off and they came around her bed and what were they talking about? What were they talking about? Acts 9, all the widows stood beside him weeping. About what? Showing the tunics and the other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them. Oh, that's just, that's so small.

No, that's necessary. That is essential. So necessary, guess what happened? Probably some little girl just got born and she needed a tunic, so Dorcas got raised from the dead and got to keep doing what she was called to do.

Her days of knitting were not done. And guess what? She kept on doing what she was going to do. Acts 13, 36, for David, after he had served the purposes of his God, the purposes of God in his generation, then he died.

That's what all of us are doing here. Brethren, you're just trying to serve the purpose of God for this generation. God has a purpose.

He has works prepared beforehand that you should walk in them. Ephesians 2.10 says that. And then you're going to die.

I'm going to die. We're just trying to do the next right thing for the Lord Jesus Christ in this Christian life. So Christian, God's designed you with a purpose.

The Holy Spirit is in you and in His sovereignty He's given you gifts. And these gifts are from the same Holy Spirit. So we should have unity.

And these gifts are going to vary in diversity. And yet these gifts are necessary. There are no expendable crewmen.

So who is the most essential person in the church to build the church up? What's the answer? Who said Paul? All, oh, probably all. All are necessary. Now, I want to close with this thought.

It really impacted me from Chad Thompson. And the point of this, I want you to see, however long it takes for whatever gift you have to be identified, I want you to leave with a thought about the importance of godly character. Godly character is so vital.

Especially if you're having like a gift crisis and you might not know what you have and where it's at, where's your character at? Where is your character, your godly character at? So think about this. Think about the point in history of Israel where a man's character and response kept God's program advancing. Think about when was there a decision by one individual that dealt with his character? And if he didn't do it, God's program... Probably multiple examples.

Think of Joseph. I'm going to read Chad's quote in a sec, but think of Joseph. Joseph hurried out for his compassion, grew warm for his brother.

He sought a place to weep. Joseph told them, don't be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here. Reverse that.

What if Joseph was angry with them and distressed? What would have happened? What would have happened? What if he actually sought to get revenge on his brothers? What happens to God's plan advancing in the world? What's going to happen? You're not going to have the Father coming and all the sons coming. You're not going to have this nation advancing. What would have happened with God's program if he did not forgive? Chad, he says this, these small actions like personal forgiveness are larger than they may appear to us.

There's a great program of God advancing in the world, but that program advances not mainly on the backs of a few missionaries through thousands of years of history, but rather it advances through Christians whose significant choices and decisions are often unnoticed by us and are heard of by very few, but are precious and necessary in the sight of God. Often we think of God's program advancing, of souls being one, of cultures being infiltrated with the subversive message of Jesus, His Lordship and Gospel, and we think about action. Missionaries being sent, martyrs dying, that sort of thing, evangelism, compassion and activity.

But at this point in Israel's history, it was personal forgiveness that moved God's program forward. It was just, I forgive you. Of course I don't hold it against you.

If he would have held forgiveness back, none of this would have worked. It was the good character of Joseph, almost by itself, that made this possible for God's program to keep advancing. When our character represents God's righteousness, when our lives are a fragrance of Christ, where we go, then and in that way the Gospel of God spreads.

Character matters. These little things aren't so little. You see, if Joseph doesn't forgive, what happens? It all halts.

One act of forgiveness of a righteous character in godliness had that much of an impact on God's program advancing. And I would read to you 1 Peter 3. Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands so that even if they do not obey the Word, they may be one without a word by the conduct of their wives. That one act of respect, of honor, the husband keeping the mouth shut, the husband who's lost, God can use that to win them.

And that's not a small thing. That's as big as God advancing His program and delivering all of Joseph's brothers over there to Egypt. God had a purpose, right? And God has a purpose in your character and your obedience.

And if you just do the next right thing and you trust the Lord, you might not see all the results in this life, but something is happening. So, brother and sister, you belong. God's designed you.

The body has a need of you. Don't miss the beauty of belonging. People are looking for that in the world.

Where can I find a place in this world? You know where they should be able to find a place? In the church. Right? In Christ. And all are needed.

And, Paul, Philippians 1.25, I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith. That's my plan. I'm here to remain with you all for your progress and joy in the faith.

Sorry at the times that I don't make your faith joyful. God help us. Let's pray.

Father, I pray that, Lord, You would use all of this for good. Lord, in this message, I'm trying to just do the next right thing, as I've said. Lord, I'm just trying to give some food that I felt like You gave to me.

And so, Lord, I hope that everything I've said, that whatever was imbalanced or not worded right, Lord, You can work beyond all of that to let this point really drive home into these precious brethren. So, Father, we thank You. You've been so good to us.

Lord, help us. Lord, help this church. Lord, I do pray You'd be with Josh and Tia for another week or so here.

And then they'll be gone for at least a season, maybe longer. Lord, we pray You'd use them. Lord, help us.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

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