

“Spiritual Body Building”

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Text: 1 Corinthians 12:4-31**

Let us pray. Holy Spirit, as we hear the Word today, we ask that you would be our teacher. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

What a joy it has been over the past nine weeks to study and learn more about the 9 core values that make up our Go, Grow and Glorify mission statement. God has called us to be part of something incredible: to be His body in this place. If we are truly going to live out our mission, it is going to take the entirety of the body working together. To follow through on any of these directives we must depend on the working of the Holy Spirit among us. Whether we Go out and share the good news, Grow in Fellowship with Jesus Christ and Other Believers or Glorify God in all things, we need to ask the Holy Spirit to equip us for this mission. If we rely on Him fully, the Holy Spirit will provide everything we need as a body to live God’s will for this particular congregation.

To help us discern how God has equipped each of us to carry out our unique role, I’d like to spend this morning considering the spiritual gifts God has given His people to build up the body of Christ. There are a number of passages that discuss the role of spiritual gifts in the church, but the most comprehensive is 1 Corinthians 12. I will use this portion of scripture as the primary text to guide our thoughts for this morning.

Please join me as I read **1 Corinthians 12:4-31**. This is a longer passage, but I think all of it is important for our purposes today.

Throughout this passage Paul makes a number of ideas very clear. Primarily, we learn that being a part of the body of Christ is NOT a spectator sport. Secondly, the proper exercise of one’s spiritual gifts cannot be done as a lone ranger. In God’s perfect wisdom, the Holy Spirit has given each and every person who confesses Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior at least one spiritual gift to use to build up the entire body. Paul says in Ephesians 4:12 that God gives us these supernatural abilities so that we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. We are not given our gift or gifts to belittle our brothers or sisters in Christ who are not given the same gift. Nor does God want us to become puffed up with pride thinking that the gift has originated from our self instead of from God’s bountiful provision.

Sky High is a fun movie that demonstrates these ideas in an entertaining way. I even took a few of our middle school students to see it the summer that it came out. The lesson unfolds on the campus of Sky High, a high school just for the offspring of Superheroes. At the beginning of each school year every entering freshman is asked to demonstrate their superpower in front of their class to determine which course of study they will be following, the one for heroes or the

one for “side-kicks.” The so called “sidekick” students have what is deemed a lesser power and are given the role of “hero support.”

Yet when the plot of the movie reaches its suspenseful climax and a super villain has moved into a position of power to defeat all of the superheroes and then the world, the only ones who escaped from her grip and have the opportunity to save the day are the freshman “sidekicks.” Even though their powers have been mocked and under appreciated, each student must use their power at the opportune time in order to save their school and the world.

The shape morphing guinea pig girl does her transformation and is small enough to travel through the ducts of the school; the turn-into-a-tree girl becomes a forest of vines that blocks a window exit; Zack attack who is able to glow, lights the way through the dark; the guy who can turn into a puddle makes their pursuers slip and fall ...you get the picture. As a result, the villain is conquered, the turn-everyone-into-a-baby machine is captured, the main character discovers his hidden superpower, the sidekicks receive their rightful recognition and all is well with the world. A happy ending indeed!



Like the students of Sky High, I think that with spiritual gifts, there are those among us who may feel like a “spiritual side-kick” or “hero support.” Just like this movie ends, Paul is clear on the point that there are no spiritual sidekicks. Everyone’s gift is critical to the proper functioning of the body. Without the well timed use of the gifts God has bestowed on His people, the body will cease to function in a healthy and growing way.

I love how Paul compares the church to a human body- both because we are the physical body of Christ on earth right now to carry out His work and also because it gives us a living picture of how essential each member is. In the first few days of an infant’s life, a series of tests are carried out to make sure all the parts of the tiny child’s body are working together as they should. In some cases if just one enzyme isn’t doing its job, the baby’s life can be in jeopardy. Thankfully, if doctors detect this early enough, they can regulate the child’s diet to avoid the dire consequences that would occur.

Everyone’s use of their spiritual gift or gifts for the building up of the body is essential to the spiritual health of us all. If the heart stopped pumping blood, the rest of the body comes to a stop as well. If the mouth isn’t taking in food, the whole body will eventually starve. If the brain doesn’t work as it should, the rest of the body will have no instructions to follow. Every part relies on all the others for the good of the body as a whole. Lungs without arteries to carry

oxygenated blood to the rest of the body would be useless. A brain without a nervous system to carry the message to the rest of the body would be futile. Nobody can carry out their gift without being dependant on the gifts of others. We need each other and everyone else needs us. Together we are a complete living organism that God has hand crafted and personally empowered to carry out His work on the earth. To be given such a mission is both an immense privilege and an incredible responsibility.

In regard to the work of the church, I love to make known that there are no church gnomes. I have been here everyday of the week and often at odd hours, but I have never seen any church gnomes. I can personally guarantee you that there are no church gnomes on staff to carry out the ministries of the church. Everything that happens around here is through their faithful service of another member of the body. Those lovely inserts in your bulletin are not the result of a church gnome paper fest. Those are the result of a person or people choosing what information to print (likely someone with the gift of administration), carrying that out and then someone else placing each and every insert into your bulletin. Each one is hand packed with love by someone with the gift of service.

Most of the things that you and I may take for granted to church are the result of one or more members of the body doing their job. You may not know who does it, but praise the Lord the Holy Spirit has given someone that gift. God has equipped some for the ministry of teaching. Others encourage the body through song. Others serve the body by turning on and off lights, cleaning nursery toys or planting flowers. Still others God has given a passion for interceding in prayer for the body. Others are given the gift of mercy to care for those in crisis or pain. Some use their gift of hospitality to welcome the newcomers or to create opportunities for fellowship. Others have the gift of leadership and help to govern the body.

While this is just a sampling of the spiritual gifts in use around us, in every way the working of the body of Christ is a glorious sight to see. Exercising our gifts for the betterment of the body is one of the most satisfying endeavors we can be a part of in this life. Receiving the help, care, and support of the rest of the body will be one of the most encouraging elements in your journey of faith.

It is wonderful to know that when you step back and see the body of Christ functioning under the headship of our Lord, that you have been a part of that. We suffer collectively when one part of the body is hurting and we can rejoice with the whole body when there is gladness for a part. I love seeing the body at work, especially when so many are a part of what God is doing.

Mike Yaconelli in his book, *Messy Spirituality*, wrote of how individual believers, who may think they are insignificant, are brought together in the body of Christ to create a magnificent work of art.

Moorhead, Minnesota, the home of Concordia College, lies across the state line from Fargo, North Dakota, a very bleak part of the country (especially during the winter). All year, the community anticipates Concordia's annual Christmas concert. Each December, a huge choir and a full orchestra give a musical performance in the concert hall at the college.

Every year, the people in the community create a unique background for the concert—a one-hundred-by-thirty-foot mosaic. Beginning in the summer, about six months before the concert, the community designs a new mosaic, rents an empty building and the painting begins. Hundreds of people, from junior high schoolers to senior citizens, paint the mosaic. They paint by number on a large-scale design that has thousands of tiny pieces. Day after day, month after month, one little painted piece at a time, the picture on the mosaic gradually takes shape.

When everyone has finished painting, an artist goes over the entire creation, perfecting the final work of art. When the mosaic is completed, they place it behind the choir. It has the appearance of an enormous, beautiful stained-glass window. The weekend of the concert, those people who helped paint arrive early, along with their friends and neighbors. Throughout the building, you can hear people whispering, "See that little green spot below the camel's foot? I painted it."

Every year in the middle of the summer in Moorhead, Minnesota, thousands of unknown, ordinary people paint a tiny insignificant tile. Six months later, the result is a spectacularly beautiful masterpiece.¹



Isn't it incredible to think that through the Holy Spirit God is gifting us to create something even more beautiful than that? The people of God, individually serving Him with the gifts He has bestowed in order to be Christ's physical representation in the world is a beautiful reality to behold.

Will you take God at His Word and trust that He gifted you the way He did for a reason? Be encouraged that your contribution towards the functioning of the body is of immense value. There are no "sidekicks" in the body of Christ because it is the same Spirit who gifts every believer. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.

How is God calling you to serve?

How is God calling you to be supported?

The discernment of these things is my prayer today for this body. May our willingness to paint our individual tiles be a glorifying piece of the beautiful design that God is fashioning in our midst!

¹ Mike Yaconelli, *Messy Spirituality* (Zondervan, 2002), pp. 118-119