**Appreciating One Another**

**1 Corinthians 12:12-27**

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Today we’re going to begin a new series called *Together*. We’re going to think about that for this month of January. Won’t you pray that God would open your heart to see yourself? See yourself not as just you and the Lord walking, but rather, you and the Lord with brothers and sisters in the body of Christ walking together. We’re vitally joined together by God for His sovereign purposes to bring Him glory, to bring you strength and grace, and to use you in one another’s life as we together advance God’s kingdom, we advance God’s gospel in our community in the world.

***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.* ***13*** *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.*

***14*** *For the body does not consist of one member but of many.* ***15*** *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.* ***16*** *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.* ***17*** *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?* ***18*** *But as it is, God arranged the members in one body, each one of them, as he chose.* ***19*** *If all were a single member, where would the body be?* ***20*** *As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.*

***21*** *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.”* ***22*** *On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,* ***23*** *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,* ***24*** *which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it,* ***25*** *that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.* ***26*** *If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.* ***27*** *Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*

This past week Kimberly and I were cleaning out some closets and cupboards and we came across this object. It’s a small, gold metal tube with a hole drilled through the middle of it. It has rough etches on one side and two letter s’s etched on both of the flat ends. Some of you may know what this is. I don’t. As we examined it, we asked ourselves, “What is that? Where did it come from? What is it supposed to do?” We found it isolated from any other parts or device. It looks like it has something to do with electronics, but we don’t know. We decided not to throw it away because clearly, it was created for some specific purpose. The formal name for this object is “Doohickey.” (Laughter!) Some would call it a “Thing-a-ma-bob.” When this Doohickey’s designer formed it, he or she created it to fit together with some other parts in order for it to function meaningfully, to have a purpose. And yet, without being placed together with other Doohickeys, this “What-cha-ma-call-it” doesn’t have any purpose. To be sure, this has existence apart from anything else. In fact, it seems to be content where it is; alone, separated, isolated. It doesn’t have to be joined together with anything else in order to be in existence. But it needs to be joined together in order to fulfill its design.

This morning we open up our Bibles to 1 Corinthians 12 as we begin this series entitled *Together: Following Jesus Does Not Happen Alone*. In this passage, God warns us against being a “Doohickey Disciple.” He tells us that while we have spiritual life through personal faith in Jesus on our own, isolated from anyone else,…That’s real. That’s true. But we are dependent upon one another in God’s family in order to function purposefully. A disciple of Jesus must vitally join together with other disciples in order to fulfill God’s eternal plan of grace. We can’t go it alone. We can’t fulfill God’s plan of grace without one another. The together life is an enriched life that fulfills God’s mission in this world. It’s able to worship God and bring Him the glory that is due Him. In John 15, Jesus teaches

**John 15:5** I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

That’s each one of us connected vitally in union, through faith, to Jesus. We need Jesus in order to bear fruit. In John 15, the Holy Spirit teaches, Jesus is the Vine, you are the branches. Live life together with other branches and you will bear much fruit. Apart from other branches you can do nothing. The Holy Spirit doesn’t use that language in 1 Corinthians 12, but that is the meaning here. The Holy Spirit uses the analogy of the human body instead of the analogy of a grapevine. But the truths taught through these two analogies are linked.

***27*** *Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*

Jesus is the Head of this Body. That means He is the leader. He is the owner of the Body. He rules it. He cares for it. He feeds it. He comforts it. He directs it. He uses it as His instrument to accomplish His purposes. That’s who we are. Together, we who believe in Jesus are the Body of Christ. Together we are His feet, His hands, His eyes, His ears, His voice. This is a remarkable gift to us, to be part of something so grand, so glorious! Together we can experience the joy of Jesus using us to accomplish His mission. Together we can experience the power of God’s Spirit unifying a people who are sinful, a people who are selfish. He unifies us, making us one. Together we can share with the world that Jesus is the answer to the pain of brokenness. There is brokenness all around us. That’s Together. What hope there is in this passage! God has opened a path for us to be part of His eternal Story in this world.

We also though, find a warning in this passage. And that warning is to beware of the Doohickey Disciple mindset.We have to be careful that we don’t become like this gold cylinder that was created for something but is no longer connected to that purpose. It is isolated, not bound together with anything else.

I know that living life together with other disciples of Jesus is often messy. It’s often painful. It’s often very disappointing. It’s often discouraging. But beloved, togetherness is God’s design for us. There is no other way to follow Jesus. I pray that through this series, we will discover the joy of God’s design in living life together in the body of Christ. The truth is wecan live the life God designed for us only as we are joined together with other believers in real, vital union. So the first point that we’re going to learn today is that

**God designs us to be together.**

***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.*

***18*** *But as it is, God arranged the members in one body, each one of them, as he chose.*

God is involved! He’s designing. He’s working.

***27*** *Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*

He’s speaking to all the members of this church in Corinth. Y’all are the body of Christ and you’re individually members of it. Together you make up the Body of Christ. Not one person is the body of Christ in themselves. But together you comprise the body of Christ and each one of you are members of it.The body analogy that God uses points us to togetherness.

Kimberly and I visited our little three-week old grandson over Christmas. We marveled over every part of his little body; his wiggling fingers and toes, his curly little ears, his button nose, his kicking legs, his stretching arms. While we rejoiced in the members of little Asher’s body, we did so in view of the fact that all of these members are knit together as one. We wouldn’t have rejoiced over an arm that was detached or an eye that was dislodged. That’s kind of gross. It is gross to think about that. And that is the nature of the body of Christ. It’s gross to think about an individual member that is detached from the body. There is rejoicing over each member, each part, because it’s joined together into this body. And that’s part of God’s glory in His design.

The body of Christ, the church, was not formed as the result of some really smart people, leadership oriented entrepreneurs getting together and deciding to start the church. This process of individual members joining together to form the body of Christ is, as verse 18 says, “God arranged.” God did that! God Himself is supernaturally working to bring individual members first into existence, into His family. And then He joins these members together to form what He calls “the body of Christ.” What a special privilege it is to be part of the Body of Jesus! Could any association be more significant than that?!

I remember when I was young, trying out for the basketball team. I thought at the time that no group, no association was more important than that one. I so dearly wanted to be a member of the group that I considered really significant, really fun. So when the list went up on the wall of the names that made the team, I was really hopeful, really eager. “Am I part of the team?” In junior high, I looked at that list and experienced the joy of seeing my name on that list. “Oh great! I’m part of this group!” In high school I experienced the sorrow of looking at that same list and seeing my name did not appear in that group. I was not included. The point here is that no group, no team, no bunch is more priceless than the Body of Christ. It’s the group that lasts into eternity. It’s the group that is part of an eternal kingdom, doing an eternal work. We are right to celebrate that we are members of the body of Christ!

Now, we don’t celebrate this fact in a proud way. We’re not pointing our fingers at those who are not members of the body of Christ and saying, “I made the team and you didn’t.” No, we are humbled by our inclusion in Jesus’ church. We’re not members of Jesus’ body based upon our performance or upon our merits. It’s not something we’ve earned or deserve. We’re members only by God’s grace. It’s a marvelous thing to be included on that list! God opened our hearts so that we were able to see His glory in the face of Jesus, to see that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. We don’t boast about this discovery. We realize this discovery was God-wrought. Our faith and our reception into God’s family is a free gift from God. God opened our eyes. God opened our heart. God made this happen. Here’s what Paul says to the church at Ephesus.

**Ephesians 2:8** For by grace you have been saved through faith.

That’s the essence of an individual’s salvation. It’s the essence of an individual’s inclusion into the body of Christ. It’s by grace. It’s through faith, but even this faith is not our own doing.

**Ephesians 2:9** And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

We don’t strive in order to be included. Just a few verses later, here is what Paul says.

**Ephesians 2:19** So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

You, who used to be dead in your sins and separated from the life of God, are no longer foreigners to God. You’re members of God’s very family. This is amazing! If we are in Christ, we rejoice! We give thanks to God. His grace is so manifold. His grace is so amazing!

A casual reading of God’s Word will clearly show how important it is to God that we, His people, live life together; that we live life in community, in union with each other. It’s a union that matters and that is practical. It’s not just in name or position only. It is lived out. I’m going toread some verses to you through the book of Acts and then one in the letter to the Corinthians that demonstrates this. But they’re all throughout the Old and New Testaments. When the church is formed in Acts 2 and the Holy Spirit arrives, Jesus baptizes the members of that church into the Holy Spirit. Here’s what happens.

**Acts 2:44** And all who believed were together and had all things in common.

Everything about their lives was pressing into each other. The Holy Spirit brought very different people from different backgrounds together. The Church was not a place to go to on Sunday morning, but the church was a people to share life with.

**Acts 2:46** And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,

Their togetherness brought mutual joy in God and a mutual expression of worship and thanksgiving to Him. And then shortly after the church started, persecution arose. Peter and John were told by the religious leaders, “Don’t you dare speak any more in the name of Jesus.” So what happened? When they heard this threat from the religious leaders, the church, the body of Christ,

**Acts 4:24** And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them,

They cried out to God in prayer together. It was vital that they join hearts in the midst of their distress and seek the Lord together. And what happened when they did that? Acts 4 tells us.

**Acts 4:31** And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

God came in the midst of this people that were gathered together in prayer.

**Acts 4:32** Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.

Do you catch those words? Those words are of unity, precious togetherness. It affected the practical perspective about their possessions. God honored their prayer-saturated togetherness by showing them more of His glory.

And now we move forward into this book that we’re studying. In 1 Corinthians 1, Paul says

**1 Corinthians 1:10** I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

This church had a problem with togetherness. God had created a togetherness but they weren’t maintaining it. They weren’t pursuing it. They weren’t realizing the promise that God had provided for them in the body of Christ. You can hear Paul’s heart breaking. He wanted them all to come together and that there be no factions; no this side and that side. He urged them to be united, to be together in the way you think about each other and the way you think about God and the way that you pursue God and His will.

In 1 Corinthians, that whole letter reminds us that togetherness for a church is hard. Just because God created it doesn’t mean it’s easy. We still live in a broken world and there are many obstacles that stand in the way as we pursue togetherness. And to be sure, we can’t create togetherness. We can’t create the unity. Only God can do that. But He calls us also to be active in this gift that He has given to us. God designs us to be together. The second idea that this paragraph teaches us is that

**God’s Spirit bonds us together.**

If it’s so hard, how is it possible to be together? Look at verse 13 with me.

***13*** *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.*

Circle that word “all.” Every one of us who are part of the church, who are believers, we were all baptized into one body. Just as the Holy Spirit of God worked a miracle to create the physical body of Jesus inside the womb of Mary,…That’s what we celebrate at Christmas. The Holy Spirit worked to produce a miracle inside a virgin to bring about Jesus, God’s Son. So the Holy Spirit works a miracle to create the spiritual body of Jesus in the church. He places us together in the church. In order to accomplish God’s work of salvation, Jesus had to take on a human body. A human body had to be made flesh and blood. For this same reason, Jesus had a spiritual body that is not made of flesh and blood, but is made up of you and me, His disciples.

The baptism referenced here in verse 13 is not water baptism, but it is Spirit baptism. Spirit baptism is the invisible work of Jesus. Jesus is the One doing the baptizing. And He is baptizing His people with or in the Holy Spirit. He immerses us into the Holy Spirit so that the Holy Spirit is no longer just around us and outside of us, but the Holy Spirit is actually indwelling us. He’s now within us. And then when the Holy Spirit comes and indwells within us, the Holy Spirit works to place us into the Body of Christ. That’s what verse 13 is teaching us. The Holy Spirit makes us part of this community of saints that is called “the church.” Here it is called the Body of Christ. Our inclusion in the church is an intentional and purposeful work of the Holy Spirit.

Notice again that every believer is “baptized” into one body.This Baptism in the Spirit is not an experience of a few extra special Christians that you might receive if you really pray for it. No, every member of Jesus’ church has been baptized into God’s Spirit. We’re all baptized into one body. The truth here being taught is that God’s Spirit joins us together with other believers into the one body of Christ. We are members of Jesus’ church by virtue of the Holy Spirit’s work in us. It’s a gracious act. It’s an amazing act. It’s a gift. And thiswork of God’s Spirit requires active obedience from us. It carries some very special responsibilities. Paul writes this chapter, 1 Corinthians 12, because the members of this local church in Corinth were not living out their togetherness, the union, the oneness in the body that the Holy Spirit had created.

**God warns us against attitudes that break our togetherness.**

There are two of them that he deals with. The first is self-pity and the second is self-sufficiency.

**Attitude #1: Self-pity.**

“Woe is me! I’m really nothing.”

***14*** *For the body does not consist of one member but of many.* ***15*** *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.*

In other words, the foot’s self-perception doesn’t matter. There is a reality that is beyond the self-perception of the individual member. It’s a reality that God has created.

***16*** *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.*

Do you see what is happening, here? There are some members of the body, as Paul fleshes out this analogy, that are saying, “I don’t feel like I have this important part. The eye, I can see what part that member has and it’s so important. I’m not an eye, so I must not belong to the body.”

***17*** *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?* ***18*** *But as it is, God arranged the members in one body, each one of them, as he chose.*

Every person has a specific place that has been ordained and decided upon by God. Each of them, as He chose, has a specific calling, a specific function inside that body, inside the church. It’s all according to God.

***19*** *If all were a single member,*

If everyone was an ear or everyone was a foot, he says

*where would the body be?*

It wouldn’t look glorious. It wouldn’t be able to function.

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

Some members in this church were thinking, “Who am I? The church doesn’t need me.” Have you ever been there? I often hear statements like, “Bethany is a big church. I don’t know if it needs me like a smaller church would.” That’s not true! Whether a church is large or small, that church needs every member functioning, in order to fully bring glory to God.

This member here that is being corrected is saying, “I don’t know if I have any really important contribution to make. I’m not as gifted as John or Suzy or Ray. I wish I had their gifts, but I don’t. I don’t think I’m useful.” And here, God is using this analogy to say don’t think too low of God’s gifting in your life. God arranged you perfectly to bring you joy and to bring Him glory through your participation, your togetherness in this church family. And He has given you exactly the gifting and exactly the ministry and exactly the role for the whole church to be able to function properly. And He uses a really silly word picture to illustrate how foolish it is for us to think that we can check out of real vital, active commitment to togetherness in the church without doing damage to the glory of God. That’s what is at stake; the glory of God. And he uses this really ridiculous illustration.

***17*** *If the whole body were an eye,*

Now let’s stop there for a moment. Just imagine for a moment this kind of ridiculous picture that he is painting. Can you imagine a whole body and all of it is just an eye? It is a ridiculous picture. You’d say, “That’s not a body. That’s just one big eye.” Or imagine, he would say later, if the whole body were an ear. That sounds even more ridiculous. It’s a funny, humorous image. It’s meant to waken their sensibilities to their need to be part of the body of Christ together. And yet, Paul is saying this is what happens when members of the church think they’re not really that important to the functioning of the whole. God creates the Body with many different members. Every member that God places in the body of Christ has some vital contribution to make. The key word there is vital. It means necessary.

Here is the application. If you’re one of those in that category who think, “I don’t know if I am really needed. I don’t know if my contribution makes that much difference,” here is the application. Believe God when He tells you that you are necessary to the proper functioning of this church. Believe God! Just trust Him because you are.

**Attitude #2: Self-sufficiency**

***21*** *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.”* ***22*** *On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,*

The first attitude that breaks togetherness in the body of Christ is “Hey, you don’t need me.” But the second attitude that verses 21-25 addresses is different. It’s “I don’t need you.” So the first is, “You don’t need me. Woe is me. I am nothing.” But the second attitude is, “I don’t need you. I think I’m doing fine on my own.”

Every saint in the church is necessary for our wellbeing, for our spiritual vitality. We can’t start amputating members of the body without great harm done to us. Every part is necessary; every part that God has arranged, God has placed. Our fruitful worship of God depends upon our joining together with other members of Jesus’ body. God has made us dependent upon one another in order to serve Him, in order to praise Him, in order to know Him, in order to fellowship with Him. He Himself has arranged it. That’s the way He has designed us as people. Yes, there are some members who receive more recognition than other members in the body.

If we start thanking God for the individual parts of our body,…So let’s think of our physical body. Think, “I want to take some time and thank God for some of the parts that God has given me in this individual body.” It’s likely we will pick some of the ones that are listed. “Thank you for my eyes. What would I do without my eyes? There are some that don’t have eyes that see and they have a hard time making it in this world. Thank you for my ears. I’m glad that I can hear. There are some that are hard of hearing. It’s hard for them to interact. So thank you Lord, for healthy ears. Thank you for legs that are able to walk. Thank you for arms or hands that can function.” We begin to identify some of those parts that immediately come to mind. And if we begin thanking God for individual members in this church, we’re likely to start coming up with some people that immediately rise to our minds because they’re more recognized. They’re more public.

Let me ask you, how long would it take, if you’re thanking God for different parts of your body, before you say, “Lord, thank you for my meniscus.” How long would it take before you start saying that? About twenty years ago, I didn’t even know that I had a meniscus until it tore and then it started speaking to me. I said, “What is that?” The doctor said, “That’s your meniscus.” I said, “What’s that?” I had to have surgery on that meniscus and I thank God for my meniscus. I thank God particularly for my meniscus in my left leg because it’s healthy. I still thank God for the little bit of meniscus I have left, even though every day, it talks to me. Everyday, it still talks to me and says, “I’m here.” But isn’t it right to thank God for every part? Just because we don’t recognize it at the time doesn’t mean it’s not important or functioning. There are some people, I guarantee in this church, without which this church would be greatly impoverished. And nobody would think of them if they started making a list and saying, “Thank you God for…” But we need them. We need you. You may be one of those people. We need you.

We must avoid the danger of self-sufficiency. Members whose contribution is not seen are no less important than members whose contributions are visible. So here’s the application. Grow in thanksgiving daily for every member of our church family. Make this a purposed goal! Say, “God, I really want to acknowledge the truth that you are teaching me in the Word and I want to begin to thank you, recognize and encourage.”

Dietrich Bonhoffer wrote a lovely book entitled *Life Together*. He had this great quote and I want to read it to you. He says:

“If we do not give [thanks daily](https://churchleaders.com/youth/youth-leaders-articles/311204-7-simple-ideas-daily-prayer-alvin-reid.html) for the Christian fellowship in which we have been placed, even where there is no great experience, no discoverable riches, but much weakness, small faith, and difficulty; if on the contrary, we only keep complaining to God that everything is so paltry and petty, so far from what we expected, then we hinder God from letting our fellowship grow according to the measure and riches which are there for us all in Jesus Christ.”

Isn’t that a great statement?! It’s convicting to me. It’s really convicting, but it’s true. It flows right out of the passage that we are studying this morning. It’s right for us to give thanks daily for the Christian fellowship in which we have been placed. And I know that sometimes that Christian fellowship seems paltry. It seems weak. It seems difficult. But it’s the place where God would say, “I will make my glory known through this weak people.” So let’s thank God for this.

**God commands us toward actions that build our togetherness.**

So He says to avoid self-pity and self-reliance or self-sufficiency. And now, lean into these actions that will build togetherness in the body of Christ.

**Action #1: Mourn together.**

***26*** *If one member suffers, all suffer together;*

That’s just a very simple analogy from this one body metaphor that Paul is using. So if in the middle of the night you get up and you walk across your dark bedroom and you stub your toe, what happens? Your mouth doesn’t look down at the toe and say, “Toe, too bad for you. Ha ha!” (Laughter!) That’s not what happens. Your mouth feels the pain of the toe because it’s connected. And your mouth gets into operation and says, “Ouch!” And then your hand doesn’t say to your toe that is throbbing, “Too bad, toe. I’m glad I’m not you.” No, your hand reaches down and starts massaging and rubbing it and trying to care for it in the midst of its distress. And so Paul says

***26*** *If one member suffers, all suffer together;*

He’s not saying something we should do, so much as something that is, when we are vitally connected to the body. He’s not saying, “You ought to suffer when other people suffer.” He’s saying this is just what happens if you’re vitally connected to the body. You feel it. We know this and experience this in a very real way to our biological families. Isn’t that right, parents? When your children are sick, don’t you suffer with them? It’s not like, “Oh, I really should suffer with them a little more.” No, you feel it at a gut level because you’re connected to them. It is a symptom of a lack of togetherness, a lack of our connection to the body when the body suffers and we’re not suffering with it. We’re living below the promise. We’re living below the grace that God offers us.

Many ask, “What can I do for God that would bring Him glory?” And they say, “Maybe I should go overseas on the mission field. Maybe I should labor downtown in the mission. Maybe I should go to the college campus and share the Gospel three or four times a week.” All these things bless God. All these things are fantastic possibilities. But what I’m telling you is sometimes the most important action that we can take in order to bring glory to God is to simply recognize that a member of our body is hurting and to call him or her up and say, “Brother, sister, I care for you. I hurt for you. I know you’re hurting and I just want to hurt with you. I want to pray with you. Is there anything I can do to relieve your suffering?” That’s sometimes the most important act of glorifying God. Certainly, if we’re not doing that but then we are going overseas or we are going to the downtown mission, something is really amiss. There is not glory to God in that. It’s togetherness that forms the center of every other part of our mission.

Togetherness means that we’re seeking some way to bear one another’s burdens. I know some of the burdens of other members can be overwhelming. I know that! When we see a member whose burdens are overwhelming, we’re tempted to back away because to enter into that suffering demands a great commitment. “If I enter there, I don’t know where it’s going to lead me. It might cost me a lot of time. It might cost me some money. It might cost me some resources.” We’re tempted to just back away. It’s easier to go home and flip on the tv instead of entering into someone’s hurt.But we are the body of Christ. What does Christ do? He faithfully enters into our suffering and He ministers to us. Bonhoffer again says:

“The Christian, however, must bear the burden of a brother. He must suffer and endure the brother. It is only when he is a burden that another person is really a brother and not merely an object to be manipulated.”

That’s strong words! He says it’s only really when we’re in this kind of relationship, when we’re bearing the burdens of another person, that they really are a brother and they’re not just someone who helps us get our agenda accomplished. He goes on to say:

“The burden of men was so heavy for God Himself that He had to endure the Cross. God verily bore the burden of men in the body of Jesus Christ.”

**Action #2: Rejoice together.**

***26*** *… if one member is honored, all rejoice together.*

Notice that word “together.” Sometimes rejoicing together is more difficult than suffering together. Why is that? Because we often must rejoice in the honor another receives even when that same honor has passed us over. And that’s hard! So we rejoice in the gift of a new baby when we are still without a baby. We rejoice in the 10th or 20th wedding anniversary of a member when our marriage has broken apart. We rejoice in the graduation of the daughter of a member when our child has dropped out. We rejoice in the physical healing of a member even as our disease is still progressing. We rejoice in the job promotion of a member even as we are let go. Rejoicing is often hard!

This is not a command to fake it. It’s a picture of a new possibility, a new reality in which we’re so connected together by God’s Spirit, that that’s what God creates. It’s a church where we naturally feel the joy of others. That’s actually what happens. Again, it’s not something so much as a should, as what is when we have this vital connection. Don’t you want to have that kind of life? I need that kind of life because sometimes the burdens and the pains are great and I need a pick up. I need the pickup of someone so close to me that I share in the joy. And that’s the possibility of what happens when we are the body of Christ.

**Action #3: Work together.**

That’s the focus of these last few verses.

**1 Corinthians 12:27-31** 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, then miracles, then 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 gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the higher gifts.

God has given gifts for the purpose of working together to accomplish God’s will. He shared that more specifically earlier in this chapter.

**1 Corinthians 12:4-7** 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 is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

The manifestation of the Spirit is the realization, the physical outbreaking of God’s Spirit. That’s what spiritual gifts are called. And so God says, “I’ve gifted each one perfectly for each church so that together, they work alongside one another, pursuing ministry together, fulfilling my mission together, and experiencing my glory so that this body, this particular church becomes a bright light in a place of darkness.” It becomes a community driven by a passion for God. And as we hear that, it’s right for our spirit to rise up and say, “Lord, begin here. Begin with me. Begin with us. Together we will lift the name of Jesus, high. Together we will fulfill your mission.”

I want to close by talking about a dear friend and brother who went to heaven just a couple weeks ago, Art Bloompot. I don’t know if you knew him. It was not long ago that he was here worshiping with us. Maybe a month and a half ago, he was healthy enough to be here. I have to tell you, I miss this guy. Art was 93 years old. He was a quiet servant of Christ who understood God’s calling for him to live his life together with other saints in the body of Christ. He faithfully ministered in this church for 68 years. He was serving oftentimes, behind the scenes. Many of you would say, “I don’t know if I recognize him.” But every Sunday, he did something for this body. Up until really a couple months ago, he was still making the cd recordings after the first service so that others could pass on the messages or take them to listen take them at home. He was a man who wanted to use the energy God had given him and the gifts God gave him to serve His Savior. He loved the Lord and he loved this church.

Recently I had a number of conversations with Art that moved me. One is we talked about the walk-up communion. Art didn’t like it. In fact it initially distressed him greatly. But because he knew we were one body, we were together, we were brothers, he came to me to discuss it. He said, “I’ve gotta talk to you about this.” And we talked. We exchanged some emails. We opened Scriptures together. We prayed together. Throughout it all, he acted as a brother to me and I pray that I acted as a brother to him. And after about two months of discussing and thinking, he came to me and he said, “Pastor, I love you.” He wanted me to know that our disagreement which originally was a very sharp disagreement about this matter, didn’t damage our relationship. And after he told me he loved me, he said, “This new communion is still not my favorite.” He said it with a smile. “But I do see your point. I see that Scripture does not forbid it and that this does help others to enter in together. What is important is that we worship God together.”

Another conversation I had with him was so unique that I have told other pastors that I think it’s likely that I may be the last pastor in America that will ever have this kind of conversion with a church member. We were sitting together at the Prime Time lunch, which is our lunch for seniors. I was sitting with Art and he was telling me the story of his conversion. He was also telling the story of coming to Peoria and the story ultimately of coming to this church. And he told me at that time, “I have been coming to this church for 67 years.” And then he pointed to a man across the table, Mansil Jett, and he said, “And he was the one who invited me.” I thought to myself, what pastor in America will ever hear those words again? Sitting at a table, one guy saying, “I’ve been in this church for 67 years,” and then pointing and saying, “And that was the person that invited me.”

Now in 68 years of time, I have to tell you that a lot has happened in this church. There are a lot of good things that have happened in the church and a lot of bad things that have happened in this church. There are a lot of sweet times and there are a lot of sour times. That’s true in every church. If you are in a church for 67 years, you’re going to experience some ups and you’re going to experience some downs. And some of those downs are hard. This church had a split in the 50’s. It was called Black Sunday by our church historian, Char Wallen. It was painful!

What would cause a person to stay in a church when it’s on a downward spiral? The answer is togetherness. We just believe in the glory of God. We believe that if we walk with the Lord, the Lord will be faithful and we’ll walk with each other. What would cause a person to stay in a church when it’s on a great spiral upward? And there are a lot of changes when it’s on a great spiral upward. All things are becoming new; new songs and new building and new people. Nothing is the same. What would cause a person to stay? The answer is togetherness. We’re the body of Christ. That’s who we are. Art was not a Doohickey Disciple! Art was a guy who said, “I’m going to join my heart and join my hands with brothers and sisters and we’re going to serve Him together.

If you have not placed your faith in Jesus as your Savior and Lord, He opens up His arms and He says

**Matthew 11:28** Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

“I’ll bring you forgiveness through my blood. I’ll bring you into God’s family. I’ll make sure that you get adopted and you’ll have a right to call God your Father.” If you’ve never trusted in Jesus, today I want to encourage you to reach out to Christ. Say, “I receive you as my Savior and Lord.” God will do a miracle in you.

If you have placed your faith in Jesus, but have not committed to church membership, I would tell you that membership is important. Togetherness is important. Membership is that outward expression that says, “Yes, I’m with you and you’re with me. We’re going to lean on each other. We’re going to serve God together.”

And finally, if you are a member but you’ve not really been that together—you sit off isolated, you don’t have a lot of fellowship, you’re not using gifts—I want to encourage you that there is a better way. There is a glorious day for you. As you would listen to 1 Corinthians 12 and respond, take some time this week to think. Think about God’s inclusion of you into the body of Christ. What a wonder! Think about Jesus’ church and how precious it is. And simply ask, “How might I join together with my brothers and sisters in my church family to glorify God?” Ask God to show you some very specific, very real commitments.

***27*** *Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*