



# GROUPS

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

**Series:** Beautiful Body - Week One - Jan 21, 2024

**Scripture:** 1 Cor 12:1-6, 1 Cor 12:12, 1 Cor 12:13 (NIV11)

**Message Summary:** We are picking up the conversation we started last year in 1st Corinthians. This year we look at the second half of the letter, which considers Christian community through the metaphor of a body. Read all of 1 Cor 12 for context.

- **Growing Strong** - Our physical bodies can be strong and resilient. And as Emerson, Jeremy's daughter, does it is ok to remind ourselves that we are strong, and we're brave. Bodies are funny, and painful, and don't work the way we hope they would, sometimes it's embarrassing to have a body, and we even have playful names for some parts of our bodies. And Paul fully leans into the metaphor of a human body to get us to think about what community really is.
- **Gifts of the Spirit** - 1 Cor 12:1-6. Before Paul gets to the body metaphor, he wants to talk about our gifts. "Jesus is Lord" means that faith is an embodied practice, and Paul's metaphor of the body is grounded in the truth that Christians are called to live a life that screams "Jesus is Lord" without having to say a word.
- **Trinitarian Community** - In 1 Cor 12:4-6, Paul talks about Spirit, Lord, God and gives us a trinitarian framework for community. Trinity gives us a metaphor to approach what God is. When we say God is love, it means that God has to be capable of love on God's own. John of Damascus gave us the term *perichoresis* (dancing around)

to communicate this giving and receiving of love within God-self. For Paul, Trinity is the model for everything that has been gifted to us, including community. Which means that however we show up - in gifts, service, works - these are intimately connected as our triune imagination of the divine the informs our life together. The more exotic gifts of the Spirit are no more important than the gifts of presence, and service and help.

- **Differences Within Our Body** - 1 Cor 12:12-13. Using the gifts conversation Paul hits another one of his favourite talking points - reconsidering our social differences in Christ. There's no hierarchy in the trinitarian community, but the beauty of our differences needs to be affirmed. Verse 15 brings us into the heart of the metaphor. Our differences, our lived experiences, our unique perspectives are what makes the body complete. Our differences are a gift that we bring to each other. Paul communicates it to his audience in two ways: First, by levelling the ground between slave and free, he actively challenges the culture and the status quo in Corinth. And second, the metaphor of a living body that comes together to heal each other is given to the people whose cultural consciousness was shaped by the Asclepius temple with its lifeless disembodied body parts. For Paul, when we learn how to bring our full selves to the community and when we learn to make room for our neighbour to do the same is when we start healing each other and the world.
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**Connect:** Where have you witnessed the strength and resilience of your own body over the past year, and where have you witnessed the strength and resilience of our community?

**Share:** What do you think of when you hear the term “spiritual gifts?” Discuss the concept of the Trinitarian community. Have you considered the trinitarian framework for community before? How does this perspective enhance your understanding of community, or maybe even reframe the whole conversation about spiritual gifts for you?

**Reflect:** Consider the background for Paul’s metaphor - the ancient practice of offering anatomical molds for healing to Asclepius.

How does that practice and cultural consciousness contrast with Paul’s vision of a living and unified body?

If faith is an embodied practice, how can living out of this metaphor promote healing in a Christian community and prevent our fragmentation? How does it speak into our unity and our differences?

**Engage:** What do you think about this thought from the sermon?

*“Whatever you think you have that lifts you above another is an illusion — an arm is meaningless on it’s own, even if you have a bicep like me. But at the same time, you are a unique gift to those near you — a body is incomplete without you.*

*Hierarchy may not exist here, but difference certainly does.*

*Jew or Gentile that affords you no status, says Paul, but your lived experience as a Jewish person, your unique perspective as a gentile believer, well that— absolutely— is a gift to those near you. So make sure you bring it all with you.*

*Don’t let the apostle Paul hear you talk about being colour-blind.*

*That’s not what he’s getting at here.*

*In fact he’s explicitly stating we all have something to learn from those with different experiences than ours.*

*Because that IS the gift we bring to each other.”*

How does this challenge the idea of being ‘colour-blind’ in our approach to diversity today? What does it mean to truly honour and learn from the different experiences in your particular context?

**Take away:** What does it mean for you to bring your full self to the community? Who and how has encouraged that for you? And how can you encourage that for others? Why is that kind of authenticity important and how does it serve the community and even the wider world?

**Pray:**

*God of everything good, and new, and ahead of us in this year,*

*Might we trust you to help us let go of what is unnecessary*

*And to notice what will be needed tomorrow.*

*Might we believe that you have good things ahead for us to uncover,*

*And that spirit will be with us, nudging us to notice in the right moments.*

*Might even those small epiphanies push us in new directions,*

*Toward new adventures*

*Where we might notice you all over again.*

*As we speak today of your beautiful body*

*That sits surrounding us even now,*

*Full of hurt and pain and joy and celebration,*

*Might we honour all of it —*

*and in that wild diversity that surprises and sometimes confounds us*

*We pray your creativity and playfulness*

*Your grace and your peace*

*Would shine through in new ways*

*To be received by new eyes.*

*In the strong name of the risen Christ*

*We pray*

*Amen.*