



KNOWING WHO I AM • Boundaries

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

I Corinthians 12

Overview

This study is about knowing who we are so that we can fully live out our Christian lives as God intended. People are often confused about who they are, trying to be what others think they ought to be or trying to be what looks good to them. In this passage, we see that God has uniquely designed each of us for a special job, or role, in the body of Christ. There is freedom in knowing who we are and living that out, rather than trying to be someone we're not and never feeling successful at it.

Context

First Corinthians is a letter that is concerned with the spiritual health of the local church in (you guessed it!) Corinth. Paul is addressing the various problems they were facing. The Bible Knowledge Commentary (Walvoord and Zuck) says:

Different parts are needed if a body is to exist (v.19). So too, no believer should think of himself or his gift as inferior and so desire another member's gift. The gifts were not haphazardly distributed (cf.v.11), but carefully arranged according to the perfect will of God (v.18).

The Body

Paul's use of the metaphor of a body for a Christian community or church seems to underscore three important lessons Paul wants to teach us about how we are to view ourselves in relation to one another.

Uniqueness

Upon becoming a Christian, everyone receives a certain spiritual gift or gifts. These gifts are elaborated on elsewhere in Scripture and include: evangelism, teaching, encouraging, mercy, giving, leadership, etc. We must add to that gifting those gifts with which we were uniquely born, the skills we have acquired and our own personalities. Paul's point is that we are each unique, and uniquely gifted. God has designed each of us in a very specific way to serve, participate and live out His will for our lives.

Not Being Who You Are Not

This understanding of our uniqueness causes us to humbly and gratefully accept who we are and who God has made us to be. We are not to envy the gifts and abilities of others, nor are we to try to be something we're not.

What's the Big Idea?

Help the members of the group see their unique abilities and contributions to the body of Christ. Also, show them that God has specifically made them this way for His (not their) purposes for their lives.

What's the Problem?

We desire people to admire us and our gifts and abilities, rather than seeing ourselves as stewards of gifts given by God to serve others.



While being jealous of the abilities, gifting and personalities of others is certainly a transgression against others, it is also a transgression of God's will for our lives and of His creative work in making us who we are. Growing in maturity should bring greater unity within the Christian community but not greater uniformity. As we mature in Christ, we should be growing in a greater understanding of the unique persons God created us to be and His unique plans for each of our lives.

Our Need For Others

A logical corollary of understanding our own role in the body of Christ is an appreciation for the roles others are to play. Part of a greater realization of who we are is the realization of who we are not. It is as a group, and not individually, that we are to meet each other's needs and manifest Christ to the world. God's desire in distributing His gifts in this way was to create our need for connectedness to each other. To know yourself, and your gifting, is also to know what you need to receive from others. This produces a thankfulness and gratitude for the gifting and abilities of others, not jealousy or competitiveness.

Character Development Involves Identity Development

Our spiritual growth and character growth are compared in Scripture to the growth of a child. Part of a child's growth is learning his own unique identity: who he is; what he is good at; what he likes; and in what he is not gifted. This is commonly referred to as establishing personal boundaries, or identity. Henry Cloud in his book, *Changes that Heal*, describes it this way:

Boundaries are the realization of our own person apart from others. This sense of separateness forms the basis of our personal identity. It says what we are and what we are not, what we will choose and what we will not choose, what we will endure and what we will not endure, what we will feel and what we will not feel, what we like and what we do not like, and what we want and what we do not want. Boundaries, in short, define us.

Boundaries have three different elements: 1) defining ourselves; 2) defining our responsibilities; and 3) defining our limits. In this study, you want to help students in the process of defining who they are, and seeing that everyone is not alike. Each person has a special and unique role in the body of Christ. Even though we are all different, we are all important.

We'll talk more about boundaries and how to set them in our next study.

What's Our Response?

You want the members of the group to see that God has uniquely made them and gifted them to serve Him and others.

You want the group to embrace and appreciate those gifts and seek to serve with those gifts, rather than trying to serve in ways that do not correspond to their gifting.

What Are the Questions?

I Corinthians 12

LAUNCH

When you were a kid and an adult asked, “What do you want to be when you grow up?”, what did you say? What would you say if someone asked you that today? If someone were to ask you “Who are you?”, how would you answer?

EXPLORE

Read I Corinthians 12.

- In I Corinthians 12:14-26 (NIV), circle the word “body” and underline the word “part(s)” or “members.”
- Below, list everything you learn about the “body” and the “parts.”
Body:
Parts:
- In summary:
“The body is not complete, or whole, without _____”
“All the parts are absolutely necessary to _____”
- I Corinthians 12:4-6, what is meant by the different terms: gifts, service and working?
- Why do you think Paul feels a need to remind the Corinthians of these things?
- Do you think the ministry you’re involved in tends to value certain gifts more than others?
- In I Cor, 12:11 and 18, it says that God determined which gifts we were to have. How does that effect your perspective? How does your gifting make sense for who you are?
- Many in the Corinthian church were not content with the gifting God had given them and wanted other gifts. Is there any way you have been dissatisfied with your gifting and personality? What gifts or abilities do you find yourself wishing you had?
- We often neglect to see God’s hand in designing our personality, natural gifts and the skills we have acquired through life. How do you see God’s hand in you having your unique personality?
- How have you seen God’s hand in your personal history, contributing to who you are, what you’re good at and what interests you?
- What part does God play in the make-up of this body (verses 18, 24)? What are some of the unique gifts and personalities you’ve observed in your group/ ministry that demonstrate God’s intentional design for your specific Christian community?
- Look at the other members of your group. How do you see each of them contributing to the body?
- What leads us to appreciate the gifts, skills and personalities of others without coveting them?
- In verse 31, Paul says to be eager for certain gifts, seemingly contradicting what he has been saying. But what is he actually talking about?

APPLY

- Write down how you see yourself making the greatest contribution to the body of Christ? What things do you feel the most drawn to be a part of?
- Take time to pray individually and thank God for the gifts He has given you. Pray as a group, thanking God for the specific gifts He has given to others.

What Are the Answers?

1. Not a question...I know. This is just a basic observation task to help people see what Scripture actually says.
2. Allow the group time to fill in the chart.
3. The body is not complete, or whole, without all the parts. All the parts are absolutely necessary to the body.
4. "Workings" means "energies," "service" – "ways to serve others." "Gifts" – "capacities, abilities."
5. They were jealous of certain gifts and desiring the more "spectacular" gifts, not valuing the love and servanthood that should animate the gift they actually had. A worldly perspective.
6. Allow the group to discuss.
7. God's personalizing of our gifts should help us appreciate them.
8. Allow the group to discuss.
9. Allow the group to discuss
10. Allow the group to discuss.
11. Allow the group to discuss.
12. As a leader you will need to set an environment where people can share. It's always interesting and helpful to hear what other people see as your strengths.
13. Appreciating the gifts God has given to us. Knowing who we are and what we uniquely add to the body. Serving and seeing God use us in our unique gifting and personality.
14. He's saying to be eager to love and serve and seek those gifts which most help others.
15. Allow time for personal reflection.
16. Allow time for both personal and group prayer.

Memorize

Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.

1 Corinthians 12:14