

My Identity in Christ

Personal Study Guides

JULY 3 - AUGUST 28, 2022



My Identity in Christ

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I AM A NEW CREATION

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

JULY 3, 2022

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

- 1 **What are some things you don't want to buy used, but will only buy in new condition? Why?**
- 2 **What are some of your favorite things to buy new or to replace? New clothes? New shoes? New electronics? New home appliances?**
- 3 **What makes us enjoy "newness" so much?**

A remodeled kitchen. A freshly painted bedroom. A refurbished piece of furniture. These are examples of things that, in a way, have been made new. The result of these refinishing projects brings great joy and satisfaction.

- 4 **If you could wake up tomorrow with a new life, what kind of changes would you want to happen?**

Many of us have wished we could just start over at some point in our lives. We wish we could avoid talking about what we said, take back what happened, move to a new place without our baggage and history, or just get a fresh start because we are in a rut.

While salvation does not bring with it a new set of circumstances, it does bring new life. And new life changes the way you handle those circumstances.

UNDERSTANDING

> *Read 2 Corinthians 5:17.*

- **How would you explain this verse, in your own words, to another person?**
- **Read John 3:3. How does 2 Corinthians 5:17 help you understand what it means to be “born again”?**
- **What does it mean to be “in Christ”?**

When a person experiences God’s salvation, they are said to be “in Christ.” This means they are joined with Christ in His death and resurrection (Romans 6:3-11) and experience forgiveness of sin and eternal life. It is only in this new relationship that they become a new creation.

- **Paul wrote 2 Corinthians to Christians. What are some reasons a believer might need to be reminded that he or she is a new creation in Christ?**
- **Now think about it personally, as it relates to you instead of someone else. Why is it significant that you are (present tense) a new creation? In what sense are you a new creation?**
- **Would you say it is evident to others that you are a new creation? Why or why not?**

All of us have experienced seasons in our walk with the Lord when we struggle with sin. However, Christ's grace is sufficient, no matter what we have gone through in the past or what we are going through now. There is no past history or present circumstance Christ cannot or will not overcome as He establishes His newness in our lives. We have hope because of the New Covenant that Jesus ushered in. Take courage! God's saving grace in our lives should affect every aspect of our being. We have been made new creations and that newness is something other people will certainly notice.

- **How does it change your perspective of pursuing holiness and godliness to know you already are a new creation in Christ instead of trying to become a new creation? How does this impact your opportunity for developing God-honoring habits?**

- **What sort of things passed away in your life when you turned to Jesus in faith?**

- **What new things have come?**

The Bible doesn't say God fixes us up. It says He makes us brand new. The old isn't repaired—it has passed away. It's gone. This includes sin and its selfish actions that are part of every person's life before they come into relationship with Christ. These old things also include worldly human viewpoints and value systems, which were especially prevalent in the lives of the Corinthian believers. Paul noted those old things have been replaced by the new. This includes a new relationship between God and humanity (believers), as well as a new relationship between believers—who make up the body of Christ. These new things include a new way of life—one guided and controlled by Christ rather than by worldly (sinful) human thinking. This newness will be culminated in the new heavens and new earth that will come one day (Isaiah 65:17; Revelation 21:1).

- **If the old is gone and new has come, then why do so many Christians still live in sin?**

Christ does the work of making us new, and then He invites us to join Him in the continual process of ongoing transformation. In other words, we have responsibility in living like the new creations that we are! Paul elsewhere described as a “renewing of [the] mind” (Romans 12:2). This transformation is not a one-time event but an ongoing process where we surrender ourselves to God so He can bring about continual renewal.

> *Read Ephesians 4:22-24.*

- **What does it mean to “take off your former way of life”? How is this connected to your being a new creation in Christ?**

- **What is our role in this process? How is that related to our daily habits?**

Transformation begins with Jesus and the truth that comes from Him. This truth pushes believers to take off the old sinful nature, and put on the new nature. Both cannot be worn at the same time—we must take off the old to put on the new.

“Take off your former way of life” means to “put off the old self” (Colossians 3:9). Each believer is to put off the old ways of thinking and acting like they would take off an old garment. That old lost humanity is constantly being “corrupted by its deceitful desires.” Sensual and materialistic desires previously deceived our unbelieving minds. We thought we were pursuing happiness when actually we were working toward our own destruction and moving toward the wrath of God.

- **From verse 24, to what model has your new self been created? Why is the statement in this verse difficult to believe and understand?**

To merely stop practicing a former way of life is not enough. Life in Christ is about new life, God's quality of life. The object of being in Christ is continually to be made new "in the spirit of [our] minds." The verb tense indicates an ongoing action. It is the opposite of being "corrupted" and moves in the direction of holiness.

- **Where do you have trouble recognizing the things that belong to your former way of life, before Christ?**
- **What role does the community of the church play in reminding one another of those former things?**
- **Look at Ephesians 4:32. According to this verse, what should be the primary motivation for pursuing holy (God-honoring, new creation) living?**

The more we reflect on and grow in our understanding of how much God loves us and how much He has forgiven us of, the more we want to treat others the same way.

- **What does the world around us say about the way that we should live? In what ways could your life or your family's lives better contrast those practices?**

APPLICATION

- 1 **Name some specific ways being a new creation should influence your relationship to God. How should it influence your relationship to other people?**

- 2 **What is God calling us, as a group, to put off today? What is He calling us to put on? What would it look like for us to follow Him in that calling?**

- 3 **How have you experienced the reality of living as a new creation because of Christ? How do you want to experience that reality in the days ahead?**

- 4 **Based on today's study, how can this group pray for you?**

PRAY

Thank God for His Word that transcends time and culture. Thank Jesus for making all things new for those who trust in Him. Ask Him to help you continue to invite and allow His Spirit to do the work of transformation in you so that you demonstrate your identity as a new creation in Christ clearly to others.

I AM SPIRIT-FILLED

1 CORINTHIANS 3:16-17

JULY 10, 2022

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

- 1 **The title for our study today is, "I am Spirit-filled." What are some different ideas people have about the meaning of the phrase "Spirit-filled"?**

- 2 **What about you? Are your thoughts related to being "filled with the Spirit" generally positive or negative, accepting or guarded? Explain.**

- 3 **How has your understanding of the Spirit's role in your life changed over time?**

There are many different ideas about the role of the Holy Spirit, even among believers in Christ. As a result, many believers give little attention to the Holy Spirit at all. But the Bible outlines the biblical standard of life in Christ, and God has given the Holy Spirit a vital role in that life and mission. If we desire to effectively join God's purposes in this broken world, we must continue to lean on the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.

UNDERSTANDING

> *Read 1 Corinthians 3:16-17.*

The letters to the Corinthians were written by Paul to believers in Corinth. In 1 Corinthians 1:2 he addressed them this way, “To the church of God at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called as saints, with all those in every place who call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord—both their Lord and ours.” What we find out as the letter continues is that these believers were spiritually immature and disunity marked their fellowship.

- **According to 1 Corinthians 3:16, where does the Holy Spirit live?**

- **In what sense are believers God’s temple? Why do you think Paul used the concept of a temple here?**

The word *temple* may sound too Jewish to some, or we might associate it with other religions’ temples. A church is composed of God’s people—those in whom His Spirit lives. God Himself indwells His church, not the place, but His people. Collectively, we, along with all believers everywhere, are God’s home.

Paul stressed that divisions are contrary to the working of the Holy Spirit and discredit God’s purpose for His people. We must live, speak, and maintain attitudes that honor God. If we live in ways that honor Him, God’s Spirit moves ever more powerfully in us, through us, and around us.

- **What practical application is there in the fact that the Holy Spirit lives in people—in you and me?**

> *Read 2 Corinthians 3:17-18.*

- **Who does God use as His agent in the work of spiritual transformation?**

- **How does verse 18 help you understand the “freedom” mentioned in verse 17?**

Moses’ veil kept the Israelites from seeing his face clearly (Exodus 34:33-35). Similarly, we all have veils obscuring our vision of God’s glory before we turn to Christ. When we turn to Him the veil is removed (2 Corinthians 3:16). We have freedom to see and experience God’s glory. This is the result of the Spirit’s work in us.

Paul envisioned an ongoing work of the Spirit that continues from when we turn to Christ through when we’re fully like Christ. The Spirit enables us to turn to Christ and live in freedom (2 Corinthians 3:3, 6, 16-17). Then the Spirit engages in our ongoing transformation into the image of Christ (v. 18). Throughout it all, the Spirit helps us understand Scripture and apply it to our lives.

- **Is spiritual transformation God’s work or our work? Why is this answer important in understanding who we are in Christ?**

- **Skim 2 Corinthians 3:3–4:2 and look for words or phrases that describe the role of the Holy Spirit in a believer’s transformation. Also, look for indications of what is expected from the believer in developing the right kind of character.**

- **How does the Holy Spirit help us see the beauty and worth of God?**

While God is at work transforming us, we also have our role in the process, which is the role of active faith. We believe the gospel message. We gaze upon the Lord's glory through the disciplines of prayer, Bible study, and worship—all the while, cooperating with the Spirit's work to reveal God's glory to us and produce God-pleasing character in us.

> *Read Romans 8:5-15.*

- **Based on these verses, how would you describe the role of the Holy Spirit? What does it look like to live according to the Spirit?**
- **What reasons for hope do you find for Spirit-led believers in these verses?**
- **Why might some people feel hopeless, not hopeful, when reading verses 5-9?**
- **What if a Christian does think about sinful things and feels more often controlled by the sinful nature than by the Holy Spirit? How do verses 10-15 help us understand the hope we have, even in our struggle against the flesh?**
- **Would you say that throughout your Christian life you have been going mostly forward or backward? Explain. How can the Spirit use even our backward steps to lead us forward?**

The Holy Spirit is the guide for our spiritual lives. The Spirit dwells in us, meaning that He is an internal source of encouragement, discernment, and revelation. God, who is perfectly holy, wants to have us in fellowship with Him. Because He is holy, however, He

cannot abide with any degree of sin. That which is in fellowship with Him must be perfectly holy. He expects us to live holy lives, and this can only happen through life in the Spirit.

- **Why is knowing the constant presence of God's Spirit a powerful deterrent to giving in to the temptations that come with our struggle with sin?**

- **How does the Spirit help you fight your battles? Give an example.**

Paul reminded the Roman believers they were not in the flesh; neither are we who are in Christ today! Though the flesh can still exert a powerful tug in our lives as Christians, we are in fact no longer under its domination. We have been fundamentally changed and are different people. Our identity and substance is now different. Though the power of sin is still present, the Holy Spirit frees the believer from being controlled by what this appetite desires. Through the Holy Spirit's work in believers' lives, sin's power has been broken. The Spirit also leads us to live in a manner that honors God.

APPLICATION

- 1 **In what situation do you personally need to see and experience the freedom the Spirit gives? How do this week's passages encourage you in that?**

- 2 **How can we press into the reality of the Spirit's presence in our lives and the power He offers?**

- 3 **What evidence shows that we, collectively as a group, have received the Holy Spirit's power?**

- 4 **In what ways would this group be different if we were more aware of the Spirit's dwelling in us?**

PRAY

Thank God for the hope you have in the refreshing power of His Spirit who leads you, even when you feel anxious, discouraged, weighed down by life, and wishing there was a better way. Invite the Spirit to fill you with the hope of Jesus and to give you opportunities to share that hope with others.

I AM GOD'S MASTERPIECE

EPHESIANS 2:10

JULY 17, 2022

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

- 1 **Has there ever been a time in your life when you were searching for purpose? Explain.**

- 2 **What about in your spiritual life? Has there been a period of time in your relationship with Christ when you were just going through the motions? How did that attitude or approach work for you?**

- 3 **How has your understanding of your purpose changed over the years?**

A common theme in children's movies is finding and discovering one's purpose. Many Disney movies operate on this principle. *Zootopia*, *Moana*, *Aladdin*, and *The Little Mermaid* all feature characters searching for meaning that they eventually locate in themselves. These movies resonate with children and adults alike because the question of purpose is one that all people ask. But does our purpose come from inside or somewhere else? Today's session assures us that God created us with purpose and He alone is where our purpose is found.

UNDERSTANDING

> *Read Ephesians 2:10.*

- **What does it mean for us to be God's workmanship?**

- **For what purpose did God create us?**

- **What do you think it means that God created our good works "ahead of time"?**

God created each of us in His image. As His image bearers, our purpose is to display His glory to one another and to all the universe. This is what Paul meant when he taught that we were created for "good works." Our works display God's glory. Our creativity, our kindness, and our love display the beauty of God in a way nothing else in creation can.

That God created us for good works beforehand can be understood a couple of ways. One is that God has ordained for us to do certain things in our lives and He will work through us to fulfill these things as part of our destiny. Another way to understand this is that God made us to glorify Him in the beginning. When we do the good works of God in His strength, we are fulfilling the purpose for which God made us in the beginning.

We ought to be generous with our good works and service to others for two reasons. One is that through these works, others will see the beauty of God through us. The second reason is we were made for this kind of service. If we do not work for God, we will live unfulfilled lives because our purpose is to serve and bring glory to Him. So as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:31, it is vital that "whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God."

- **The word for “workmanship” in the language of the New Testament is the same word from which we get the English word “poem.” What does this lend to your understanding of what it means to be made by God?**
- **Read Colossians 1:16 and Psalm 139:13-14. According to these verses, how long has God had a relationship with you? What intentionality and loving care was shown in the creation of every person?**
- **To what degree does a creator determine the purpose and meaning behind something they have created? What changes about the direction of your life when you understand God made you?**

Often the Bible makes statements that are difficult for the limits of human language to explain. Being God’s “workmanship” is one such example. This word means we are God’s masterpiece, the work of a master artisan. All people are a work of art created by God with intention and meaning. Through Jesus, God intentionally created all men and women in His image and knit them together in their mother’s womb. God’s physical act of creation implies an inherent purpose behind each person He creates. All people have intrinsic purpose, value, dignity, and worth because of the Creator behind them.

- **According to Titus 2:13-14, why did God claim a people for Himself? What does it mean to be “eager” to do good works?**
- **Both Ephesians and Titus suggest that our good works are predetermined with intention. How does knowing that God has prepared these works for you change the way you act?**

- **Do you think about your life this way? Why or why not?**

- **Hudson Taylor was a nineteenth-century missionary to inland China who said, "A little thing is a little thing, but faithfulness in little things is a great thing." Most of the works we are called to walk in are not big things. What small things has God prepared for you this week? How do you determine what these things are?**

God created us to fill the earth with His glory. One way we do this is by doing good works that give evidence that we have been made by God. The Lord has created these opportunities for us. They have been predetermined by Him. Our purpose is not something we have to search for, but something we have to grasp. Our purpose is given to us by God in ordinary, day-to-day experiences. Most of the works we will be called to walk in are not huge steps, but dozens of small steps taken every day.

- **Read Proverbs 16:24. How is saying the right thing at the right time included in the good works God has placed before you to walk in? How do we keep ourselves open to these moments?**

- **Are you intentional to spend time with God each day? When you do this, does it impact your sense of purpose? If so, share an example with the group.**

Our purpose is defined by God; when we allow God's Word to shape our lives, the opportunities to live our purpose become clearer. We know these works are ready and prepared for us beforehand. The more time we spend with God, the more we are able to discern which good works He wants us to do. It could be as simple as encouraging a stranger or as significant as sharing the gospel with someone. God has prepared the works; we simply need to walk in them.

> *Read Colossians 1:9-13.*

- **If the Colossian believers were created by God in Christ Jesus for good works, then why did Paul need to pray constantly for them to live that way? Why do we who are God's masterpiece need to constantly pray that we live that way?**

Paul wrote that he did not cease in praying for the Colossians. He knew the battles they faced with false teachers and the misinformation about their faith. Therefore, Paul went to God about it. Paul's prayers for the church were born out of his love for the church and his trust that God desires—and hears—our prayers. Consistency in prayer does involve discipline, but more than that, it involves a heart that cares for people and wants to know God. True and lasting heart change, being reflected fully as God's masterpiece, is a better motivator for prayer than discipline because it helps us see prayer as a privilege instead of a responsibility.

- **What does it mean to "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord" (v. 10)? How does prayer aid in this process?**

When Paul wrote "walk worthy of the Lord," the verb tense in the original language of the New Testament means to keep on walking. "Pray constantly" means to have a prayerful heart. Just as you become like your spouse or friend the more time you spend together, the more you become like God through quality time in prayer. Prayer strengthens our communion with God and leads us to live a life that is pleasing to Him, in the identity He has given us.

APPLICATION

- 1 **Do you ever look at your life and feel like it doesn't make sense? What are you missing in those moments? How does Ephesians 2:10 apply to those moments?**

- 2 **We might believe we are God's masterpiece, but wonder if we are living as He desires. What are some signs a person has found God's purposes and is living in them? What are some signs a person is not?**

- 3 **Read 2 Corinthians 7:5-7. God uses other Christians to comfort us and point us back to our purpose. What are some ways we can do this for each other? How are we already doing it?**

PRAY

Thank God for creating you as His masterpiece with purpose and meaning. Pray that you would feel and deeply understand the meaning behind your life and walk in it every day. Ask God to put people before you who are searching for meaning so that you might point them to find meaning in Him.

I AM SET FREE

ROMANS 8:2

JULY 24, 2022

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

- 1 **If you were free to do whatever you wanted for one day, what would you choose?**
- 2 **How do you define freedom? How does our culture define freedom?**
- 3 **Finish the following sentence: I am free to _____.**

Freedom is a loaded term in American culture. We take our rights and liberties very seriously, and infringing on those rights is grounds for lawsuits and protests. However, the biblical idea of freedom goes beyond what we associate with civil liberties. True freedom is found in Christ and obedience to His teaching.

UNDERSTANDING

> *Read Romans 8:1-4.*

- **How would you define "condemnation"? What does condemnation have to do with a person's relationship with God? Why is there no condemnation for people in Christ Jesus?**

A person under condemnation is one who has been pronounced guilty and sentenced to punishment. Because of the fallen state of humanity, we all enter this world guilty of sin and deserving of death. We are not free at all! We do not have the ability in and of ourselves to have a relationship with God and receive the eternal life and grace He offers.

- **What does Romans 8:1-2 teach about freedom?**

In the book of Romans, Paul sought to answer a basic question: How can sinful people be righteous before a holy God? Here he answered: in Christ, we have no condemnation. We do not need to fear rejection from God. The focus here is not solely on the end of life. Having no condemnation means we have no reason to live with guilt in the present. To be in Christ means to be alive through Him. As Christians our lives are identified and determined in Christ.

- **Verse 2 compares “the law of the Spirit of life” with the “law of sin and death.” What characterizes each of these ways of living?**

- **As a Christian, your life is defined by the law of the Spirit. In what ways are we tempted to live under the law of sin and death even after we become Christians?**

Paul added a new dimension to the definition of life in Christ Jesus with the Spirit’s law. The law of the Spirit is responsible for breaking the hold of the law of sin and of death. This law enslaved and led to death. The Spirit is freeing and life-giving. The former life relied on rules. Life in Christ relies on relationship.

- **What “law” was Paul referring to in verse 3? What were its requirements?**

- **How did God arrange for us to meet the law’s requirement, even in light of our sin?**

The law—which refers to the Ten Commandments—could not bring life, because it was limited by the flesh. Meeting the requirements of the law depends on sinful humans living without sin.

With the exception of Jesus Christ, no one has ever been able to keep the law perfectly. Because of our sin, the law only highlights the depth and breadth of our problem with temptation. In this way,

it condemns us. However, what we were unable to do in the flesh, Christ did by taking on our flesh and conquering sin. Where we are sinful, He is perfect.

- **We can't fully realize the extent of freedom in God's grace until we realize the depth of our slavery to sin and condemnation. How might considering what God saved you from help you live as one who has been truly set free?**

- **How does Jesus's death on the cross set you free?**

God condemned sin in that He broke its power by sending His own Son in our place. Having perfectly fulfilled the law, Jesus was uniquely qualified to serve as a sin offering. He could voluntarily take on Himself the penalty for sin and offer forgiveness in its place. Christ's accomplishment is even more impressive, because He submitted to sin's domain. Jesus took on Himself the same weakness we have in the flesh. He was subject to the full reality of temptation. He knows what we face. To be in flesh like ours underscores this truth and proves that the divine Jesus Christ took on a body like ours in every way, yet remained sinless.

- **Jesus's death on the cross makes it possible for God to view us as righteous. What part do we play in securing that righteousness?**

In simple terms, to be righteous means to live in obedience to God and His law. Jesus's death fulfilled the law's requirement that we be righteous, living in obedience to the law. We were unable to do that in and of ourselves, but Jesus did it for us. Having fulfilled perfectly the overarching requirement, Jesus imparts His righteousness to believers. In this way, the requirement of the law is accomplished in us. We now fulfill the law by having faith in Christ. We accept His gracious gift and rely on Him—rather than our own strength—to please God.

> *Read Galatians 5:1-12.*

- **Why did Paul consider freedom from the law so important?**
- **How did the false teachers in Galatia inspire Paul to emphasize freedom? How was Paul uniquely capable of understanding the bondage that the law created?**

Jesus Himself is the truth that sets people free. The truth of His person and work is what gives a believer freedom from sin and freedom to connect with God. The same truth Jesus spoke of was the truth Paul put forth to bring freedom to the Galatian church. The freedom that comes from God's grace in the death of Christ gives everyone an unhindered relationship to God. The law cannot do what Christ has done.

- **How did false teaching remove the offense of the cross? How does the cross offend someone who wants to follow the law?**

Paul, never one to mince words, argued that if circumcision was so effective, then maybe the false teachers should go a step further and emasculate themselves. His point remains true today: If there is a single thing we can do to earn the favor of God, then the cross becomes irrelevant. On the cross, Jesus once and for all did what was needed to redeem people to God and nothing can take its place.

> *Read Galatians 5:13-15.*

Paul wanted the Galatian believers to be set free. However, he knew the dangers that could come with freedom and warned the Galatians of potential pitfalls.

- **What dangerous opportunities does freedom provide? What was Paul afraid freedom would give the Galatians an opportunity to do?**
- **What does the abuse of freedom look like?**
- **Why do you think Paul emphasized service to one another through love? How does service protect from the dangers of freedom?**

Freedom can lead to license and entitlement, which is another form of addiction. It can cause a person to indulge in their flesh. Paul wanted the church to serve and love one another because the law, when practiced in freedom, leads to love of God and others. The freedom Paul encouraged could lead to dangerous sins against one another if the believers gratified their fleshly addictions.

> *Read John 8:32.*

- **Jesus spoke these words directly after many people put their faith in Him. He told them if they would hold to His teaching, then they were His disciples. What would they know as a result of following Jesus?**
- **According to this verse, how is knowing truth possible?**

Truth isn't playing hide-and-seek. It can be found. Knowing truth sets us free. When we are able to live according to the real source of truth, we find freedom to live as we were designed.

- **Why do some people think following Jesus is more like bondage than freedom?**
-

- **How does John 8:32 speak to that line of thinking?**

APPLICATION

- 1 What are the false teachings about freedom you run into most in your everyday life?**
- 2 Based on today's passages, how would you explain what it means that "In Christ, I am set free"?**
- 3 From what struggle do you most long to be free? How do today's Scriptures encourage you in that?**

PRAY

Praise God for the redemptive work of Jesus Christ that brings you freedom and for the wisdom and love God has shown in Christ's death. Pray that the people at FBC Hendersonville would grow into the freedom provided by Jesus. Pray for the leadership of the Spirit in the specific struggles of the members of your group.

I AM AN AMBASSADOR

2 CORINTHIANS 5:11-20

JULY 31, 2022

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

- 1 **Everyone is driven, to some degree, by a desire to be a part of something bigger than themselves. How do you see this drive working itself out through the lives of people you know?**

- 2 **How does this innate desire to be a part of something bigger drive people both to and away from faith? Share a personal story if you have one.**

Many people choose professions that allow them to be a part of something bigger than themselves. An ambassador is one such job. Historically, an ambassador spoke the words of a king in the absence of the king. When an ambassador spoke, it was understood that the king spoke. Ambassadors didn't speak their own words; they spoke only the words they were directed to speak. They didn't stand on their own authority, they stood on the authority of their home country and of their leader, and they were always on duty. Though the role of an ambassador has changed with modern inventions like the telephone, television, and Internet, they still speak in various forms on behalf of their country.

Paul called Christians ambassadors for Christ. Christians have surrendered their own rights and authority and, instead, stand as Christ's representatives in the world, declaring His message of reconciliation. Christians live in a foreign country proclaiming a message of hope until the day they inherit their reward with Christ in the new creation.

- 3 **How does the image of an ambassador help you better understand your role as a follower of Christ in the twenty-first century?**

UNDERSTANDING

> *Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-17.*

People should be willing to forsake all that they have to follow Christ, but how is that possible? Lifestyles have a way of clinging to people, and sin has a way of taking root and taking hold on our lives. Paul acknowledged that what he was saying seemed a little crazy. He urged others to follow after Christ without the prospect of earthly gain; he also put his own life in danger for this cause.

- **What gave Paul the boldness to live as He did and encourage others to do the same?**

- **Why might some people have been tempted to criticize Paul? How did he seem to be out of his mind?**

Paul trusted that those who received Christ's salvation can actually live for Christ because God has given them a new heart and a new nature. This was true not only for the Corinthian believers, but also for God's believers in the world today. Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation and, as a result, can put their sin behind them and live the life that God intended for them.

- **How does the salvation that Christ offers bring about a familial bond among believers of all nations, tribes, and tongues (see Revelation 7:9)?**

Because Christ died and rose again, you no longer have to be controlled by the sins and shortcomings of your past. God is not ashamed of you. God loves you and, as His child, He has given you His Holy Spirit to empower you to honor Him with your life. The old has passed away and the new has come. The old sinful life you once lived is dead and it has been buried with Christ. In salvation, you have become new through the resurrection power of Jesus.

- **Read Romans 8:1. Why is there now no condemnation? How does this truth help you live into Christ's love and grace more completely?**

> *Read 2 Corinthians 5:18-21.*

- **What did Paul mean when he called us ambassadors? What are our job responsibilities?**

An ambassador is committed to representing the values of his or her home kingdom even while living in a foreign land. They are first and foremost citizens of another country, and they live displaced specifically for the purpose of representing that other country. Because we are new creations in Christ, we have a new home. While we are here on earth, we represent God and His kingdom wherever we go.

- **Once you embrace this role, how does the way you see the rest of your life change? If you have been a Christian for awhile, how has this calling progressed over time?**
- **The city of Corinth was an ancient center of commerce and trade. Paul wanted the church there to focus on Christ's mission rather than the lesser missions of their culture. What are some of the lesser missions we are tempted to focus on today?**
- **The word for "church" in the language of the New Testament literally means the "called out ones." It is a military term for people with a military mission. What is the mission of the church? What happens when the church loses sight of her mission and pursues lesser things?**

Because Christ has given us hope in the life to come through His death and resurrection, we are privileged to live our lives in faithful service to Him as our King, here in the present. Christ's salvation has never been forced on anyone. Instead, in grace, Christ offered eternal life, and all who call on His name have secure salvation in Him. It is the privilege of God's people to serve Him as His representatives in the world.

Through His people, God is making His appeal to the world to be reconciled to Christ. The church was given to God's people for His glory and their edification. But the church was also given to the world for its good and hope. The church is God's plan A for proclaiming the gospel, and there is no plan B. Unless the people of Christ serve as the faithful ambassadors of Christ, the world will never hear the good news of Christ.

- **How is our church faithfully serving as God's plan A in the world around us?**
- **How can you join with our church to plead on Christ's behalf for others to be reconciled to God?**

The new creation that is offered in the New Covenant can only be good news for those who hear it. It should be the greatest blessing in the entire world for God's children to serve Him faithfully and to proclaim His good news with others.

- **How is the essence of the gospel encapsulated in verse 19? If you trace the story of Scripture, where else do you see the line of reconciliation running throughout God's story?**

In Paul's former life as a Pharisee, he believed he could earn God's approval. Now as a Christian he knew everything came from God through grace. God wants sinners to come to a right relationship with Him. Through Christ's sacrifice, God does not count their trespasses against them. Suffering was the means

by which Jesus brought others to life and reconciliation with God. When we come to saving faith in Jesus, our sinfulness is replaced with His righteousness. We are dependent on God to make this transaction possible, and we remain dependent on Him to help us live as obedient disciples.

- **Consider the following statement: The gospel has not truly been shared unless it has been understood. Why is this statement true?**

- **What are ways that the gospel can be miscommunicated or misunderstood?**

God made Him who knew no sin “to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). God exchanged the filthy rags of our sin with the glorious righteousness of Jesus on the cross. Jesus bore what He did not deserve and gave us what we could never earn. Serving the King, then, should not be a begrudging labor, but one of pure joy. Having been rescued from the evil taskmaster of sin, we freely and gladly serve our King.

- **How are you regularly serving the King with your time, your talents, and your treasures?**

- **What are the things that distract you from serving your King?**

APPLICATION

- 1 **On a scale of 1 to 10, how conscious of God's purpose of reconciliation are you from day to day? How would being more aware of God's purpose make your life as a believer more contagious?**

- 2 **How would your life change if you saw yourself (first and foremost) as one sent by God on His mission?**

- 3 **To whom is God calling you to be an ambassador this week?**

PRAY

Thank God for His call on your life to be His ambassadors. Ask that God would, by His Spirit, remove all burdens and distractions that keep us from living out that holy calling.

I AM A CHILD OF GOD

1 JOHN 3:2

AUGUST 7, 2022

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

- 1 **Do you look like your parents? Do you act like them? In what ways?**

- 2 **Most people say the older they get, the more they act like their parents. In what ways is that OK with you?**

It is important to know God is different from earthly fathers and mothers, even at their very best. Being God's child means never having to worry that He will leave. Being God's child means you can bank on His promises forever. God is a loving Father, and He is fatherly in His care toward us. Unlike an earthly father, God is a perfect Father.

The primary identifying factor John took as evidence that God is our Father is the love He has lavished on us. John saw this primarily through Jesus's relationship with God. John lived every day with Jesus and saw, better than most, the relationship God had with Jesus. Through Jesus, God now offers the same relationship to us. Because of Jesus, God desires to know us as sons and daughters.

UNDERSTANDING

> *Read 1 John 3:1-3.*

- **How do these verses convey excitement from John? Why do you think John was excited here?**

- **What is so remarkable about the love of God in Christ?**

- **John indicated there is an obstacle that prevents people from knowing God and His children? What is that obstacle?**

God's love for you was demonstrated in Christ at the cross. He did this not because you were righteous or deserving, but because He is good and loving. His love is not an ethereal concept, rather, its magnitude demands expression. It is actively demonstrated in your very existence and in the free gift of salvation, which invites you into transformative fellowship with God. This is what the world finds so difficult to believe! Throughout Scripture, God is the One who does the work necessary to bring all people into a relationship with Him, and He continues to put forth that effort in your life by loving and forgiving you.

- **Why is it important for us to recognize that God loves us like a Father? What implications does this have for us?**

- **How would you characterize John's confidence in his position before God? Do you share his confidence that you are a child of God? Why or why not?**

- **What does it mean, practically, to be God's child?**

God made a way for us to be called His children. And we are. It's so simple that we sometimes miss the gravity of our salvation and what it means for both now and eternity. We were separated from God with no way to be in right relationship, but in Christ we have been reconciled (see Ephesians 2:12-13). We have been called sons and daughters of God, but this was not our own doing. He made a way by which we simply believe and are adopted as His own (see John 1:12).

This is only possible because of the way God has lavished His love upon us through the person of Jesus. But the world doesn't have eyes to see the love of Christ without His Spirit working in and through them. God's love is so unrecognizable to the world because His love is not of this world.

- **How is our perspective limited in this world? How will Jesus break down those limitations in eternity?**

- **If we are the sons and daughters of God, what do we stand to inherit from Him?**

John had to remind his fellow believers—Christians who were facing persecution and false teachers—that full knowledge of God will only come in eternity with Him. On this side of heaven, Paul said we can only see dimly (see 1 Corinthians 13:12). But when we are glorified with Christ—unhindered by our flesh—we will see Him as He is. Knowing and hoping in what is to come should inform the way we live our lives. In other words, our theology has to inform our practice in this life. If our hope is fixed on Christ, then the natural response should be to purify ourselves, so we can better reflect Him to the world.

- **When did you first understand that God has accepted you as His child?**

> *Read Galatians 4:1-7.*

Paul alluded to a ceremonial process of his day where a son would take on the full rights of an heir. Before that day—though a child of his father—the son was functionally a slave with no rights or privileges to his father’s estate, merely living under the watch and protection of guardians and managers. After that day, the son’s primary relationship would be with his father.

- **How does the gospel radically alter our status before God?**

Paul used this historical custom as a metaphor for our relationship with God. The prerequisite to receiving the Holy Spirit is sonship. When we are saved, our legal status before God is changed to that of a child and an heir. We now enjoy all the rights and privileges of our Father and our primary relationship is with Him.

- **What do you think “when the time came to completion” means? What does it mean for the work of Christ?**
- **Based on verse 5, what do we receive as a result of our redemption?**
- **How does Christ transfer His rightful status as a Son to us?**
- **What must we believe to receive the status of a child?**

Before the advent of Christ, the Jews (much like the child described in verses 1-2) had been enslaved to the law. They had yet to attain the full inheritance as sons of God. Likewise, the Galatians had been enslaved to the pagan idolatry of the surrounding culture. The “fullness of time” refers to an appointed time. It is a time purposefully set to accomplish a prepared task. In this instance, the appointed time refers to the coming of Christ and His redeeming death. Believing by grace and through faith in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we are adopted into God’s family.

- **“Abba” is a more personal name, like “Daddy.” God is a personal Father. What does that tell you about your relationship to Him?**

The word “Abba” is an Aramaic word that was translated into Greek. It was an affectionate title that young children would use for their fathers. When we cry to God, we are not reaching for a distant Father, but a loving daddy. We are able to do this because of the Spirit working within us. The word used for “crying” is a word that carries with it the idea of passionate expression. This crying is not chiefly about the words that come out of your mouth but the disposition of your heart. As we see more of Jesus in the gospel and are overwhelmed by the goodness of God, our hearts cry out in praise.

- **Read John 1:12. How do you get to be an adopted child of God?**

God sent Jesus to make it possible for us to be adopted into His family. We are adopted into His family when we believe in Jesus, God’s Son. Being adopted into God’s family means you have a relationship with Jesus and the Holy Spirit lives in you.

APPLICATION

- 1 **What obstacles are there for you in living out your purpose of being loved by God and enjoying relationship with Him as a son or daughter?**

- 2 **If you are adopted into God's family, and others who trust in Christ are also adopted into God's family, how should that affect your relationship to others in the church?**

- 3 **In what ways do you need to become more like your heavenly Father?**

- 4 **How do you respond to knowing that suffering and being different from the world are a part of being in God's family? How can this group help with that?**

PRAY

Praise God for the ways the Spirit changes you from the inside out and makes you aware of your status as God's child. Ask Him to help you focus on being His child so that you might enjoy the benefits of being in His family and resemble Him more and more each day.

I AM A MEMBER OF CHRIST'S BODY—THE CHURCH

EPHESIANS 5:29-30

AUGUST 14, 2022

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

- 1 What are some common opinions held in our culture about the church?**

- 2 What reasons do many people who profess faith in Christ have for not being fully engaged members of the church?**

- 3 What are some reasons to be a fully engaged member of the church?**

In the last several weeks, we've seen that in Christ we are new, Spirit-filled masterpieces of God who have been set free, as His children, to be His ambassadors. It is a blessing to know who we are and to live out that identity! However, many believers struggle to appreciate and take on their identity as members of Christ's body, the church. We see the flaws in churches and sometimes find it easier to offhandedly dismiss our roles as part of the church than to live out that aspect of our identity in Christ. Today's study in Ephesians 5 will help instruct us in this.

UNDERSTANDING

> *Read Ephesians 5:29-30.*

- **Look at the verses preceding these. What analogy did Paul use? Why?**
- **What does it mean to be a “member” of Christ’s body?**
- **Why do many believers have a hard time relating this to being a “member” of Christ’s church?**
- **What does this analogy say to you about Christ’s love for His church? What two things does Jesus do for His body (v. 29)?**

Sacrificial love is foundational to our identity because Christ gave Himself in sacrificial death for us, His beloved. He has joined us to Himself inseparably, and He nourishes and cherishes us. In other words, Christ’s love for the body of believers did not stop with His death. In His resurrection life, He continues to show His love by everything He is doing on our behalf.

- **Think about how Christ lived while He walked the earth. What would it look like for someone to truly live like they are joined to Christ’s body today?**
- **How does the local church help us live that out?**
- **Can a person be identified as Christ’s body, the church, if they are not partnering in faith with other believers in the context of a local church? Explain.**

> *Read Ephesians 4:1-12.*

- **According to these verses, what do all Christians everywhere have in common?**
- **If we already have unity in Christ, why don't we experience greater unity in our churches and between individual believers?**

The seven unities in verses 4-6 (three related to the Trinity and four related to the church) are eternally true in God's purposes and plan. Realizing these truths will help us live up to our calling.

- **What are some of the differences that tend to separate believers within the church? How can we focus on the things we share in common? The things that bind us together?**
- **Practically speaking, how do we cultivate and nurture fellowship among believers? Why does this matter?**

There will always be differences of opinion on worship styles, church decor, the budget, and minor points of theology. As long as we agree on the essentials of our faith, differences in personal preferences need not threaten unity. Believers who display humility, gentleness, patience, and love don't insist on their own way. They are willing to listen to others and put others' needs before their own.

- **What grace did Paul refer to in verse 7? How did he say this grace has been given to us?**

- **Are church leaders responsible for carrying out all the ministries of the church? Why or why not? What is the primary task of these gifted individuals?**
- **Who has been given the task of doing the actual ministry of the church? What are some examples of this “work of ministry” the saints have been given?**

The word *saint* in verse 12 is related to the word *sanctification*. At the time of saving faith in Jesus, believers are separated in Jesus from the world. Therefore, all believers are saints. We participate with the Spirit in a life-long process of transformation into conformity to the image of Jesus Christ (see Romans 12:1-2).

- **According to verse 12, what should be the outcome of our ministry to one another in the church?**

> *Read Ephesians 4:13-16.*

- **In these verses, how did Paul describe the difference between mature and immature believers? How does maturity enhance our unity in the church?**
- **How did Paul say we overcome immaturity and instability in our faith?**

The context helps us understand what Paul meant by “speaking the truth in love” (v. 15). Rather than being taken in by false or deceptive teaching (v. 14), we must know the truth and stand up for what we believe. But we must do this with grace and compassion.

Truth without love comes across as prideful and condemning. Love without a commitment to the truth will compromise even essential doctrine to avoid hurting feelings.

- **What do we learn from Paul's analogy of the church as a "body building itself up in love"? What might it mean to be a "supporting ligament" in this body?**
- **Why is living in community with other Christians necessary for real spiritual maturity? Explain.**
- **How have you observed Christians working together to build up the church (that is, one another)?**
- **How does this passage underscore the importance of your relationship with fellow believers?**
- **In what ways could we help our fellow group members grow in their devotion to and effectiveness for Christ?**

Every member of the body of Christ contributes to the growth and maturity of the church as a whole. As we get to know Christ and His truth, and live out that truth in loving ways, we become unified in faith and purpose and mature together as we build up one other.

- **How will you commit to building a stronger congregation, one that is becoming what God wants it to be?**

APPLICATION

- 1 **Based on today's passages, how would you describe what it means to be a member of Christ's body, the church? Name some specific behaviors that would indicate we are living in our identity as members of "Christ's body" (e.g., sharing the gospel, serving others, seeking God's will, staying connected to the Father in prayer, etc.).**

- 2 **How are we living that out well here at First Hendersonville? How can we do that better?**

- 3 **What are some specific ways Jesus has nourished and cherished us?**

- 4 **The truth is, we can be present at church and never really participate. What would it look like for us to really participate in nourishing and cherishing each other as members together of one body?**

PRAY

Praise God for the connection you have with Him and each other. Ask Him to show you how to participate with Him as those who are joined together as His body, the church. Invite Him to make that reality apparent in Hendersonville so that other people might be drawn to Him and become members of His body too.

I AM FILLED WITH THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

GALATIANS 5:22-26

AUGUST 21, 2022

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

- 1 When you were young, who had the most power over your behavior? Why were they so influential, either positively or negatively? Who or what influences you the most today?**

- 2 Describe a time when you believed confidently that the Holy Spirit directed you to take a specific action. What does that mean? How does the Holy Spirit direct a person?**

Kids learn things by watching and observing the world. But there are other things (like world history, science, math, etc.) that need to be described for them. Kids need someone to teach them, if they are to grow in knowledge and understanding. In a similar way, we need the Holy Spirit to reveal God's truth to us. We can't grow spiritually without His work in our lives. We lack understanding—especially when it comes to spiritual truth—until the Holy Spirit guides us and teaches us.

UNDERSTANDING

> *Read Galatians 5:22-23.*

Paul wrote this letter to the churches in Galatia due to less-than-ideal circumstances. Paul was the pioneer who brought the gospel to this region of the world. After he shared the gospel with those in Galatia, he saw many people respond with faith and repentance, and soon churches were formed. Paul moved on to share the gospel in other places and entrusted the continued growth and health of the church into the hands of the believers themselves. However, it wasn't long before the Judaizers showed up preaching a false (but somewhat similar) gospel. The Galatians bit hook, line, and sinker. They believed the lie that it wasn't only the sacrifice of Christ that would save them, but also the works of the law.

Paul emphasized (to put it mildly) to the Galatians that they had to choose between following the law or walking by the Spirit. In Galatians 5 he outlined what life in the Spirit looks like.

- **Who is the Holy Spirit? What role does He play in our lives?**

Earlier in this series called "We Believe," we learned that we believe in one God who is three persons. God is three Persons, but one essence. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the same in substance and equal in power and glory. The Holy Spirit dwells among and in God's children. He acts as a counselor and helper. He lives in God's children to teach us and give us the power to battle sin and become more like Jesus.

- **What results from walking by the Spirit?**

Galatians 5:16 says, "I say, then, walk by the Spirit and you will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh." In other words, the more we walk by the Spirit, the less we will sin. Not only does a Spirit-filled life result in less sin, but it also produces more fruit. In verses 22-23, Paul listed this fruit.

- **How evident is this fruit in your life?**

- **If you had to choose one of these characteristics that best describes you, which would it be? What about the one that least describes you?**

The Holy Spirit works in us in the process of sanctification by helping us to flee from sin and producing positive attributes of Christlike character. All aspects of the fruit of the Spirit can be seen in Jesus throughout the gospel narratives.

> *Read Galatians 5:24.*

Paul told the Galatians that those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh. This means believers have died with Christ to sin (see 6:14). We should remember that “flesh” here does not refer to our physical bodies, but to the fallen nature, with its tendency toward evil. Now that the old has passed away for Christians, the old nature that was a part of that order should also pass away.

- **How have you experienced the process of putting the flesh to death? Why is this process difficult?**

In Romans 7:15-19 Paul said he had the desire to do good, but he often did evil instead. Why was that? What did Paul still have to battle? Paul, like us, continued to battle the sinful nature. In Romans 7:21-23 he described the struggle going on inside him as a battle or war. This should teach us that our struggle against sin is serious, difficult, real, and sometimes violent. But we should also keep in mind that we can win the battle.

- **Read John 14:15-18. What does Jesus expect that those who love Him will do?**

- **Who is the Helper believers receive?**

It is through the help of the Holy Spirit that we can crucify the flesh with its passions and desires. This process of sanctification lasts until our physical death and can sometimes be very difficult, but the battle is worth it and we are not left alone to make progress.

> *Read Galatians 5:25-26.*

It is important to remember that justification (when God declares us “Not Guilty!”) happens in a moment. It is a point in time. Sanctification (becoming more like Jesus), however, is a process that lasts a lifetime. This means we will go through various seasons, peaks, and valleys of transformation. There will be times when we feel as though we are making giant leaps in our growth. But there may be days, weeks, or even months or years when it seems like we have completely stagnated. Paul said living by the Spirit means keeping in step with the Spirit.

- **What does it mean to keep in step with someone?
How do we do this with the Holy Spirit?**

The Greek word here is *stoicheo*, which means to “walk in line behind a leader.” The emphasis isn’t the idea of someone walking in perfect imitation of the leader. Rather, the point is that we keep going and do not give up. Think about if you were following a guide up Mount Everest. You may not take the exact steps of the guide. You may fall a little behind at times. You may even take a misstep and fall. But the point is you keep going and do not give up.

- **Are you keeping in step with the Spirit, or have you given up? Do you continue to strive after Christlikeness in your life or have you turned your focus to other pursuits?**

Once our hearts are opened to the gospel and we respond with faith and repentance, God justifies us. At that moment, the lifelong journey of sanctification begins. We are not on the journey alone, however. Our heavenly Father gives us the Holy Spirit by whom we both put off the old self and put on the new self. Our job is to keep in step with the Spirit and not give up.

- **How did Paul say in verse 26 that keeping in the Spirit would affect unity in the body of Christ?**

- **How have you experienced this or experienced division when not keeping in step with the Spirit?**

APPLICATION

- 1 **Do Christians who spend time with you see the fruit of the Spirit in your life? Do you see it? Do you truly desire to become more Christlike?**

- 2 **Are there parts of your flesh (the old self) that you continue to protect and allow to live? What needs to be crucified in your life now? What practical steps do you need to take to crucify it?**

- 3 **Are you keeping in step with the Holy Spirit? What spiritual disciplines do you practice in order to walk with Him?**

PRAY

Thank God for the gift of His Spirit. Ask Him to show you what it means to put off the old self and to put on the new self. Invite Him to help you walk in step with the Holy Spirit by being diligent, prayerfully reading the Scriptures, and faithfully gathering together with your local church.

I AM UNIQUELY GIFTED

1 PETER 4:10-11

AUGUST 28, 2022

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

- 1 Do you have any talents? If so, what are they?**

- 2 Is your talent something you've worked on over the years or more of a natural ability?**

- 3 How have you used your talents and abilities for the benefit of others?**

When you watch someone like LeBron James play basketball, his superior talent is obvious. Does his skill come from innate ability or is it something he has worked on through practice? The reality is, it's a combination of both, and the result is unprecedented skill. Yet in the church, we are all able to serve without exception. There is a sense in which the church of Jesus Christ is a team sport—we pour ourselves out for the good of the team and the glory of Christ. We steward our gifts to work toward a common goal. All followers of Christ have been given gifts of the Spirit to love and serve the community of faith and contribute to the mission of God—and the health of the church requires the use of all of our gifts.

UNDERSTANDING

> *Read 1 Peter 4:10-11.*

- **What is a steward? What does it mean to steward a gift from God? What are a few ways we can do that?**

Gifts like grace are unmerited. We did not do anything to deserve the gifts of God we have received, but these gifts are meant to be shared. Stewarding a gift means putting it to use in its proper context, the church. The church is designed to function best when each individual member uses their gifts to serve.

- **What did Peter mean when He said gifts show “the varied grace of God”? Why are all gifts necessary?**

- **What are we denying the church if we do not use our gifts?**

Because there are various gifts, they are all necessary, meaning every member of the church is necessary to do the work God has called us to do. For the church to function properly, we must understand that every member matters to God. If we refuse to steward our gifts, we are denying the church the ability to minister in a specific way. God has all the resources He needs to build His church, and through His grace, we are one of those resources. We honor God by using our gifts in the way He intended.

- **What has being filled with the Spirit produced in our lives? Why does this filling need to be poured out to others?**

- **Are there any Christians without a gift? What should that teach us about the stewardship of our gifts?**

Spiritual gifts are given to all Christians without exception, and they are used to build up the church and contribute to its growth and health. Spiritual gifts, like salvation, are gifts of grace and should give rise to praise and thankfulness in our hearts. We pour ourselves out because the Holy Spirit has filled us up.

- **Why is it important for us to realize that as we pour ourselves out, we are laboring with the strength the Lord provides (v. 11)?**

- **What is the ultimate goal of exercising our spiritual gifts (v. 11)?**

The fundamental purpose of our spiritual gifts is to glorify God by serving others. We glorify God in the use of our gifts because the fact that we even have gifts points back to the grace of God in Christ. He is the giver of gifts, and when we steward our gifts, we are laboring with the strength God provides.

> *Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-26.*

- **How did Paul address the tendency to think of some parts of Christ's body as more important than others?**

- **Why is the body a helpful analogy for helping us understand how individual members of the church work together?**

The human body is a wonderfully complex and intricately organized group of parts that all depend on one another to sustain life. Our gifts in the church serve the same way. They are all necessary for the church to thrive. When we pour ourselves out through the stewardship of our gifts, we are ultimately serving each other.

- **Why is it important for us to understand that no part is greater than any other?**

- **Look at Paul's question in verse 19. Where would our church be if everyone had the same gift?**

- **What are some gifts we have a tendency to think of as being "more important" than others?**

The Corinthian church, the original audience for this letter, had a problem with hierarchy and self-importance. They were constantly comparing themselves to one another and assigning more importance to some members of the body than others. No gift is more important than others, because no individual Christian is more important than another. The gift of preaching is just as necessary as the gift of giving. The gift of service is just as necessary as the gift of wisdom. We need every gift that is present within the church.

- **What does God's diverse gifting of Christians show us about His character?**

- **How does the diversity represented provide greater vitality to the life of the church?**

- **How can we embrace the diverse gifts in our church?**

We serve a God who loves diversity. Take a look around and you'll see people of every age, ethnicity, size, and shape as part of the body of Christ. Part of the job of the church is to help its members come to understand the nature of their specific spiritual gifts and how they might use those gifts to serve the body of Christ. Spiritual gifts help us understand the great value of individual Christians working together for the mission of the Kingdom.

> *Read James 1:17.*

- **Who did James identify as the giver? What type of gifts do we receive from this giver?**
- **How does this verse change your understanding of your spiritual gifts?**
- **What does James 1:17 teach you about God?**
- **When we receive gifts from people, it is not uncommon to write thank-you notes to express gratitude. How do we express our gratitude to God?**

The greatest of all God's gifts is a new birth. It is the gracious gift of God to offer salvation to people. His purpose always has been to provide redemption. The message of truth is the gospel, the good news of salvation by grace through faith in Christ. In the gospel, we recognize God is generous to us, and we give Him credit for all the good we enjoy. This calls for us to identify all we have received from God and to express gratitude to Him for these gifts. We express our gratitude to God by sharing His gift with others.

APPLICATION

- 1 **Do you know what your spiritual gifts are? If so, what are they? If not, how could you find out?**

- 2 **How are you currently using your gifts to love and serve the church? Do you have any gifts you are not using? If so, how could you use them?**

- 3 **What are some ways we can encourage others to use their spiritual gifts?**

PRAY

Thank God for sending His Spirit to empower the church. Praise Him for the gift of a community where everyone matters and everyone participates. Pray that God would help you find the place where you can best serve Him and use the gifts He has given you.

