

Care For One Another
1 Corinthians 12:14-26
Rev. Brian Bill
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Last Sunday afternoon, we held a special business meeting to vote on a new pastoral staff position. This proposal did not pass. I want to share three lessons from this.

1. **We have been praying for God to make His will clear regarding this decision.** This happened through the vote of God’s people. Christ is head of this church and sovereign over every decision. We want what He wants, and only what He wants. We started the meeting by focusing on Ephesians 3:21: ***“To Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”***

2. **It’s not lost on me that I preached on God’s pruning process three times this past weekend.** I willingly submit to whatever God wants to use to get me to bear more fruit, and for our church to bear much fruit. John 15:2 says, ***“...every branch that does bear fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”*** I’m striving to apply what I preached: *“If we faithfully follow Jesus, He will make us fruitful. Pruning must take place in order for grapes to grow. You and I have been reborn in order to reproduce, but the only way for that to happen is through a painful purifying and purging process because pruning yields a bigger and better crop.”*

3. **It’s time for us to move forward in faith...together.** No matter how you voted or how you feel about the decision, we are *one body*, made of different parts. Romans 12:4-5: ***“For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”***

The Bible lists 59 “One Another” statements, showing how God expects us to behave toward other believers. In fact, it’s impossible to live this out unless we are in community with Christians. In a culture filled with vitriol and anger, Christ-followers are to live and love like Jesus.

Today, we’re beginning a brand-new series called, “One Another.” Here’s where we’re headed for the next five weeks, leading up to Easter.

*Care for One Another
Be United With One Another
Accept One Another
Carry Each Other's Burdens
Bear With One Another*

Interestingly, in Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians, Paul makes over 30 references to the local church functioning like the human body. Just as our complex and intricate bodies need care and attention, so too, the church can only be healthy and experience growth when everything is in balance and properly exercised.

Church ministry is always multi-dimensional. We must strive to keep our four focus areas in equilibrium in order to remain healthy – we're called to make disciples, who make disciples by gathering, growing, giving and going with the gospel, all for the glory of God.

In other words, *our message must remain biblical, our mission must reflect balance, and our ministry must rely on the body.*

Let's read 1 Corinthians 12:14-26 together: 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 the 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."***

Here's the main idea: *God has placed you to live out your purpose in this place for His pleasure.*

When you came in you were handed a puzzle piece to serve as a reminder you are a valuable part of God's picture for this church. We're in this together. Did you know every snapshot of the church in the New Testament is a group picture?

The Apostle Paul stayed in Corinth eighteen months working through the many problems that divided the church. It's in this setting, he tells them it's time to get into spiritual shape by doing some body building. His basic point is we're all linked together as pieces of a puzzle. And as such, our linkage means we are bound to "do life together" and to care for one another. Take a look at your puzzle piece as we walk through these principles.

1. Each piece is distinct and yet united with the whole. Though we are one, we are also unique. We see this in verse 14: ***"For the body does not consist of one member but of many."*** The word ***"many"*** carries the idea of ***"abundance"*** or ***"much."*** The New American Standard puts it like this: ***"For the body is not one part, but many."*** The New Living Translation renders it this way: ***"Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part."***

Unity is good *and* diversity is good.

- *If unity is emphasized at the expense of diversity, we have uniformity. That is not good.*
- *If diversity is emphasized at the expense of unity, we have anarchy. That is not good either.*
- *We need to celebrate unity without demanding uniformity. Unity and diversity. Diversity in unity.*

On the first day of school a first grader went to her newly integrated school at the height of the segregation storm. When she came home, her mother anxiously asked how everything went. The little girl said, *"Oh, mommy, do you know what happened? A little black girl sat next to me!"* The mother, fearing her daughter was traumatized by this experience, asked her how she got through the day. The daughter smiled and responded, *"We were both so scared that we held hands all day long."* Isn't it wonderful how young children have the ability to see past how we are different and allow the ways we are the same to draw us together?

God dreams of a church where black and white, Hispanic and Asian, rich and poor, farmer and businessperson, couple and single, married and divorced, widow and widower, cop and convict, student and senior citizen, reformed prostitute and rambunctious preteen, former addict and faithful attender, lifelong saint and new believer can all join hands and celebrate our designed diversity within unfettered unity.

Ephesians 4:25 says, ***“For we are members one of another.”*** Just as our human bodies are one unit made up of many individual parts, so too, the body of Christ is one entity with a plethora of pieces.

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2. Each piece is indispensable, and no one is inferior. In verses 15-16, Paul addresses those of us who may feel inferior: ***“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. 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.”***

Every part of the human body is designed to work in synch with every other part of the body. A foot may feel less important than a hand and an ear may feel mediocre compared to an eye. Paul is establishing the truth everyone is valuable and necessary. The phrase ***“not make it any less a part of the body”*** is used twice to emphasize that no one should have a sense of inferiority or feel like they don't matter.

One pastor captures it this way: *“The foot is jealous of the hand because he is covetous of the hand's prominence. The hand is in the public and in the limelight, but the foot is in confinement inside a shoe...yet, the body would be in bad shape without a foot. Did you know that you use more than 200 different muscles to walk? Similarly, the ear feels inferior to the eye. The eye is out front whereas the ear is on the side. No one ever talks about the ears. Lovers look into each other's eyes; they don't look into each other's ears!”*

In order to make his point, Paul pictures an absurd scenario in verse 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?”*** It would be pretty gross if your whole body were an eye! As I'm looking out all I'd see is a bunch of eyeballs looking at me. We could see everything but hear nothing. Plus, we'd get stuff in

our eye all the time as we rolled around the house. It would be equally eerie if each of us were ears.

The smaller pieces in God's puzzle called the church are just as important as the more visible ones. No one is inferior because everyone is indispensable. This church will never function as God intends if you and I don't fulfill our individual roles.

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3. Each piece is divinely designed and perfectly placed in the body. When we fully grasp this truth, we will experience freedom and joy like we've never had before. God made you just the way He wanted you! You have been designed to reflect His purposes! He has shaped you for spiritual significance!

I'm told when puzzle factories punch out puzzle pieces, no piece is exactly the same as any other. Your piece has a place in the puzzle called the church! Look at verse 18: ***“But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as He chose.”*** The word ***“arranged”*** means, ***“to set, to be perfectly placed.”*** This same word is used in John 15:16: ***“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide...”*** You are not an accident because you are part of God's sovereign placement in the Body of Christ.

Notice verse 18 says, ***“each one of them.”*** No matter how you feel, you are not exempt from God's exhilarating exhibition of His glory in the church. You are not disqualified because of something you've done or how inadequate you may feel. Because you have been designed on purpose, you *have* a purpose, and that purpose is to find your place which is shaped exactly like your piece of the puzzle. Once you discover your place, then it's time to plug into the greatest adventure ever.

God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, ***“as He chose.”*** The word means, ***“to delight in.”*** Do you realize God delights in you? It gives God pleasure to purposely give you purpose. You may want to write down Zephaniah 3:17 and put it on your dashboard or bathroom mirror: ***“The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will quiet you by His love; He will exult over you with loud singing.”***

God has placed you in the church for His delight and pleasure. Listen to Psalm 135:6: ***“Whatever the LORD pleases, He does...”*** And He doesn't make mistakes.

That means when we question the size or shape or color of our piece of the puzzle, we're really questioning God. When we refuse to interlock our piece with others, then we're disobeying God. When we make a commitment to connect with Christ and with His people, He is pleased beyond measure.

4. No one is superior, but everyone is essential. Next, Paul speaks to those who are filled with superiority in verses 19-21: ***“If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. 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.’”*** We're not to demean our own gifts, nor are we to despise the gifts others have. The human body is an incredible masterpiece and it's amazing what a body can do when all the parts are working together as they should.

As you look at your portion of the puzzle and compare it with those around you, you'll quickly discover yours is designed differently. The shape of your piece and the location where it fits in God's picture of the church is distinct from everyone else's. There has never been anyone like you before and there will never be anyone like you again – and that's probably a good thing (that's one of the many reasons I'm against cloning because I wouldn't want another “me” walking around).

A sea captain and his chief engineer constantly argued about which of them was more important to the ship. Because they couldn't agree, they decided to swap places. The chief engineer went up to the bridge and the captain went into the engine room. A couple hours later, the captain ran up to the deck of the ship, covered with oil and soot. As he wildly waved a monkey wrench, he yelled, *“Chief! You'll have to come down to the engine room; I can't make her go!”* To which the chief replied, *“Of course you can't! I've run her aground!”*

Your contribution to the kingdom is unique and your role is essential. Having said that, we must guard against thinking we are more special than those around us. Instead of believing our piece is prominent, and everyone else's is a poor imitation, we must realize we're all different. But different doesn't mean deformed because we all need each other. God has designed us to be mutually dependent upon each other.

The church at Corinth had many issues, pride being right at the top. In verses 22-24, Paul reminds them every part of the body is important: ***“On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.”*** Even those parts of our own bodies which are ***“unpresentable”*** are important. This refers to the body

parts we keep covered for reasons of modesty, which shows how important they are. In a similar way, the pieces of the puzzle that are never seen, like prayer and giving, are very important to the health of the body.

You will never care for Christians, or non-Christians for that matter, if you believe you're somehow more special, more important, or better than they are.

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5. Each piece is interconnected, not independent. The last part of verse 24 establishes the principle of interconnectedness. Your puzzle piece is designed to lock together with those around you in order to form the picture God designed for the church. It is God's desire for each member to intermingle and interlock with each other: ***"...But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it."***

The King James translates the word ***"composed"*** with ***"hath tempered together."*** This word refers to ***"the mixing, commingling, or coalescing"*** of two elements to become a compound. A similar idea is found in Genesis 2:24, where we read a man will be united to his wife and they ***"shall become one flesh."***

I heard about a poor family that couldn't afford a Christmas tree. They waited until Christmas Eve and found a tree that was OK on one side, but pretty bare on the other. Then they picked up another one that was full in the front and scraggly in the back. They nervously offered \$3 to the salesman, hoping he would take the money, and he accepted because no one else wanted the two trees.

Later that night, the salesman was walking down the street and saw a beautiful tree in the couple's apartment. It was thick and well rounded. He knocked on their door and asked them how they got such a beautiful tree. The husband showed him how they had worked the trees close together where the branches were thin and tied their trunks together. The branches overlapped and formed a tree so thick you could no longer see there were two.

Brothers and sisters, when we're put together just right, a stunning makeover takes place. God loves to take us with our weaknesses and tie us together with other scraggly people in order to make the beautiful body of Christ. For better or for worse, we're stuck *with* each other because we're stuck *to* each other.

This welding together of lives within the body of Christ provides two challenges:

1. **Promote unity.** According to the front half of verse 25, God does this so: ***“That there may be no division in the body...”*** The phrase ***“no division”*** means, *“no dissension, faction, schism, or tear.”* We’ll learn more about this next week when we focus on: *“Be United With One Another.”*
2. **Practice mutual care.** Listen to the last part of verse 25: ***“...But that the members may have the same care for one another.”*** The phrase ***“same care”*** means, *“to be anxious about.”* That means we should worry about the welfare of others.

This is what is described in Acts 4:32, 34-35: ***“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...there was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.”***

Verse 26 fleshes this out for us: ***“If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.”*** When someone is hurting, we should rally together to help. I’m thankful this church is known as a caring community. Many of you can attest to the support you’ve received when you were in need.

Verse 27 provides a great summary statement: ***“Now you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it.”*** This isn’t an optional add-on or something that might happen later on. If you’re saved, you *are* the body of Christ, right now. We do life together because we belong to each other. The word ***“member”*** means a portion, or a “piece.” You are a piece of the puzzle God is putting together at Edgewood!

Your Piece in God’s Puzzle

How many of you are dissectologists? Let me try a different question. How many of you enjoy putting together jigsaw puzzles? Apparently COVID has caused a huge resurgence in “puzzling” this past year. There’s even a new category of people called, “Pandemic Puzzlers.” The largest puzzle manufacturer is now making 2-3 times more puzzles than ever before.

I thought it might be helpful to hear from some dissectologists, so Wednesday morning, I made a simple post on Facebook asking this question, *“If you like*

putting jigsaw puzzles together, could you share your tips and tricks?” Within 24 hours, there were 116 comments!

As I share some of their insight, I’ll also make some brief application to our lives. Look again at your puzzle piece and think about how this illustrates what we’ve learned today: *God has placed you to live out your purpose in this place for His pleasure.*

1. **Study the picture on the box to see what you’re creating.** *We must keep God’s purposes for the church in mind. Become familiar with what God is calling us to be. Consult often during the process.*
2. **Dump the pieces out of the box.** *We’ll never become what God wants us to be if we keep everything packaged up. In order for salt to be effective it must get out of the saltshaker and light must go into dark places.*
3. **Things look chaotic and messy at the beginning.** *One person wrote, “The best thing is to keep it in the box because it’s a chaotic mess!” Another person said, “My trick is not to do them...they are too confusing.” Following Jesus is often messy, especially at the beginning.*
4. **Turn all the pieces right-side up.** *We’re not much good if we’re upside down. Also, give people some slack by focusing on their best side.*
5. **Organize your pieces by shape type.** *Find out how God has uniquely wired you. Odd-shaped pieces are actually easier to work with.*
6. **Separate into colors.** *This is not good advice for the church, especially since we already do too much of this.*
7. **Find the four corner pieces.** *It’s helpful to find what is foundational and build off of it.*
8. **Work on the outside border first.** *We must always start with the borders which are found in the Bible. Things work best when we stay within God’s parameters.*
9. **Find the central subject and work to complete it.** *Pick a prominent part of the puzzle and collect pieces that look alike. Keep Christ at the center of everything you do.*
10. **Put together small portions to form ‘mini-puzzles.’** *It’s good to get in a discipling relationship or a Growth Group to live out God’s Word in community.*
11. **Find a friend to help.** *Two are better than one. See Ecclesiastes 4:9-12.*
12. **Don’t force a piece to fit if it doesn’t.** *If you do, you will bend the corners and another piece will be prevented from taking its rightful place. Pieces fit where they belong. It’s always better to find a ministry that is the right fit for you.*

13. **Change your angle to get a new perspective.** *Stand back and look at what you're creating. Consult the Scriptures regularly and get wise counsel when needing wisdom.*
14. **Find a puzzle you can complete.** *It's important to start small and build up over time. One grandpa wrote, "If the 1,000 piece becomes too hard and frustrating, I quickly put it away and scale down to the grandkids' large 20-piece puzzle!"*
15. **Work on one piece at a time.** *Do the next thing in front of you. One person wrote, "Putting a puzzle together is like life some days; you never know what piece to pick."*
16. **Never give up.** *We're called to persevere even when we encounter problems. One person speaks for many of us, "I start with a few pieces. If it doesn't work, I throw it on the floor, stomp on it, and then burn it. I don't like puzzles...patience is a virtue that needs some work!"*
17. **Concentrate and focus.** *It's hard to grow unless we are focused. One mom wrote, "Get distracted with life and kids, dogs knock pieces on floor or chew on them, therefore losing pieces before life allows you to come back to the puzzle for days at a time, scoop all remaining pieces up and throw them in the trash. With the box. Vow to never do puzzles again."*
18. **Make sure you have all the pieces.** *Every piece is important, and every person has a place here. One wise shopper said, "Never buy puzzles from Goodwill or Salvation Army. There's always a piece or two missing." One husband wrote, "Puzzles are easy...grab a piece off the table. Place piece in pocket. Come back when the time is right and place the majestic last piece in."*
19. **Make the most of the process and enjoy it.** *Find joy in your journey with Jesus, no matter how chaotic and confusing it feels at times.*
20. **Keep referring back to the big picture.** *Keep your eyes focused on what God is building because it will give you direction.*

Let's consider some ways we can put this message into practice.

Application

1. Take the next step in connecting to this body. If this is your first time here, or you've been visiting for several weeks, we're glad God has brought you here. May I encourage you to keep coming if this is the place where you sense God leading you to contribute your piece of the puzzle? I urge you to join with a group of people who can help you when you're down and whom you can help when

they're down. Others of you are ready to become members. The key is to take your next step.

2. Figure out how you fit and then plug into God's puzzle. God wants us to be involved according to our giftedness. There is a ministry here that is a perfect match for who He has made you to be. Teddy Roosevelt was known to have said, *"Do what you can, with what you have, where you are."*

3. Ask God to give you a practical way to come alongside someone this week. There are needs all around us. Some of us miss them because we focus almost exclusively on ourselves. Ask God to make it clear how you can care for someone who is hurting. It might be a note, a phone call, a meal, childcare, or some financial assistance. Remember, we're called to care for people, not cure them. That's God's job.

4. Be vulnerable and ask for help when you need it. When you and I are authentic, others will feel more comfortable opening up.

5. Invite others to discover their place at Edgewood. We'll end up passing out around 500 puzzle pieces this weekend, but there are a lot more to go around because this puzzle [hold up box] has 2,000 pieces! Take your puzzle piece home and put it somewhere as a reminder. Determine to invite your friends, co-workers, neighbors and relatives so they can discover their purpose and place in God's family. Reach out to someone you know who does not feel comfortable gathering in person yet.

I've always liked the church sign that says, *"What's missing from 'ch__ch? UR."*

Conclusion

Several centuries ago, in a mountain village in Europe, a wealthy man wanted to leave a legacy to the townspeople, so he decided to build a church. When it was finished, they marveled at its beauty and completeness. He thought of everything. Then someone asked, *"Where are the lamps? How will it be bright enough in here to have services?"*

The nobleman pointed to some brackets on the walls. Then he gave each family a lamp and said, *"Each time you are here the area where you are seated will be well lit. Each time you are not here, that area will be dark. This is to remind you that whenever you fail to come to church, some part of God's house will be dark."*

God has placed you as a strategic piece in His kingdom work. You are an important part of the mission and ministry of Edgewood.

God has placed you to live out your purpose in this place for His pleasure.

I close with these words from Annie Flint...

*Christ has no hands but our hands
To do His work today;
He has no feet but our feet
To lead men in His way;
He has no tongues but our tongues
To tell men how He died;
He has no help but our help
To bring them to His side.*

*What if our hands are busy
With work other than His?
What if our feet are walking
Where sin's allurements is?
What if our tongues are speaking
Of things His lips would spurn?
How can we hope to help Him
And hasten His return?*