

In 2015, JJ Abrams and Lucas Films released Star Wars: The Force Awakens. Over 100 million people in America went to see it in theaters. It went on to make over 2 billion dollars, one of the highest grossing films of all time. Many people recognize the big-name actors in this film like Harrison Ford, Mark Hamill, and Carrie Fisher; others know Adam Driver and Daisy Ridley. At the end of the film are the credits, and though it takes a long time to give attention to, you see, as the credits begin to roll, how many people were a part of making a film like this possible. There were 4 writers, 14 producers, and 188 cast members. There were 72 stunt people, 44 hair and makeup specialists, 89 wardrobers, 83 people working on sound, 161 camera and electrical engineers, 427 in the art department, and over 1500 who worked in vision and special effects. If you add in all the people who worked on the set for security, transportation, and food services, this movie required over 4,000 people to bring to completion. Four thousand people, each with their own specialty, their own gifts, talents, and abilities, aligned toward one goal: helping one of the most beloved movie sagas of several generations come to life. Every person doing their part resulted in something spectacular.

What is true of a world class film we might go see in theaters is also true of the church. If you have your Bibles, will you please turn with me to 1 Corinthians 12. Today, we are going to continue in our series in the book of 1 Corinthians and see what God has to say to us about being a part of a church where we all, filled with the power of the Spirit, play our part to build up the body of Christ. This is a really important passage for what it means to be a part of our church community. I think the Lord has some very important things to communicate to us today!

Let's start reading.

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of

helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? Now eagerly desire the greater gifts. (1 Corinthians 12:12-31)

This is a passage where I believe God wants to speak something very specifically to our congregation, and perhaps something very specifically to you. The key takeaway is this: you are a part of the body of Christ. You are a part of the body of Christ. When you placed your faith in Jesus, were baptized, and received the Holy Spirit, the end result wasn't simply that you have a personal relationship with the Lord and a ticket to heaven when you die; you became a part of the body of Christ. This is the only version of Christianity that exists according to the Bible. You can read the entire Bible, from cover to cover, and you will see there is simply no version of Christianity that exists where you get to do an individual, privatized relationship with the Lord apart from connection to his body. Moses had a personal relationship with God, but he was always connected to the people of God. David had a personal relationship with God, but he was always connected to the people of God. Jonah, Elijah, Peter, Paul—the list could go on and on.

God designed his people to be a part of a broader group, the body of Christ. This is clearly spelled out for us in two different verses in our passage: “For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body” (verse 31), and “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (verse 27). The Bible talks about our being the body of Christ on numerous occasions. Almost every time we see this teaching, in Romans, Ephesians, and Colossians, we learn that Christ is the head of the body—he is in charge, he makes the decisions, he gives the orders, and we are all different parts of the body, united and joined together, working in conjunction with one another to do what Jesus wants.

This is the longest contiguous teaching about the body of Christ anywhere in Scripture, and this passage augments and expands our understanding of what it means to be a part of the church—the body of Christ. For example, we learn you are a unique part of the body of Christ. Our physical bodies have 206 unique bones and 78 unique organs; we have cells and tissue and cartilage. Every part is unique. The same is true of the body of Christ. “If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?” (verse 17). Just like our body has so many unique parts, all of which play a vital role in our health, vitality, and capacity, we all have a very unique part in the body of Christ. Part of our uniqueness pertains to the gifts we've been given. Emerson talked about this last week. We learned that God has given different people all sorts of different gifts: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, prophecy, discernment, speaking in tongues, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading, mercy, helping, administration, faith, hospitality. These are all unique gifts that people have, but it's more than only our unique giftings that set us apart. The church is filled with children and people in their 90s, men and women, married and single, retired and working, introverts and extroverts. Even though there are thousands of people in this specific church, this specific expression of the body of Christ, there is no one just like you. You are a unique part of Christ's body.

And that prepares us for what is next: you are a unique, strategic part of the body of Christ. The person you are is not accidental or random; it is for a very specific purpose. It was intentional. God knew just what he was doing and has a strategic plan to use you in a particular way. Look at verse 18: “But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.” Written language is a great example of how important strategic placement is. Look at this word for example: cigetarts. That's all the letters to strategic, but the letters are backward. Or you can spell it almost right, like “tsrategic,” but even having the first two letters out of place confuses the entire word. In order for us to read in a meaningful way, every one of those nine letters has to be in its correct place—strategic. The same is true of the body of Christ. The body of Christ is designed perfectly, brilliantly, and strategically by God, with many unique parts, all set in the exactly right place.

You are a unique part of the body of Christ and a strategic part of the body of Christ. Here's one more: You are a unique, strategic, indispensable part of the body of Christ. Because each part of the body is unique and strategic, it is essential that each part does its work. "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!' On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable" (12:21-22). Every part of the body is unique and strategic and needed. Can you imagine living your life without your left foot, without your right hand, without your ears or eyes? We could live without those parts of our body, but we would be severely limited. If an indispensable part is inactive, we won't thrive. Last week over 100 million people tuned into watch the NFL conference championship games. The Cincinnati Bengals played against the referees and lost. It was unfortunate. In the early game, the 49ers played against the Eagles. The 49ers had a 3rd string rookie quarterback who had won seven straight games and had never lost in the NFL. Just a few plays into the game he was sacked and tore his ACL. His backup came in, a fourth stringer. He played for a couple series and then got sacked and suffered a concussion. In the biggest game of the year, one of the best teams in the league had no quarterback. What do you think happened? In the movies there would be some fairytale story of a make-a-wish kid coming down from the stands, putting on a jersey, and leading them to the Super Bowl. That's what Hollywood would do. But this is real life. What really happened is they didn't score another point and lost the game 31-7. When you have a team and every person has a unique and strategic purpose, everybody, no matter who they are, is indispensable. When everyone shows up and does their part, it's incredible. When they don't show up, everybody else feels it and suffers. The same is true for the body of Christ.

So let's look at what we've seen so far: you are a unique, strategic, indispensable part of the body of Christ. Now here's what Paul really wants us to know: this is true whether you like it or not. Some people hear the message about being a part of the church, the body of Christ, and they love it. They love being in church every week. They love serving. It's second nature to them. There are other people who hear the message about being a part of the church, the body of Christ, and say, "No thank you. I am an introvert. That's not really my thing. I'll just come, sit, and listen for an hour and then check out." Others will say, "I don't need the church at all. I can connect with God just as well on my back deck, or in the woods, or in a coffee shop, or (fill in the blank)." I understand those sentiments. I know some people don't love relational interactions at church or are so busy they don't know how they would fit it in. I know some people feel they connect deeply with God outside of the church. I get that, but none of that changes the fact that God himself has made you a part of the body of Christ! Your personality, your preferences, your preferred pathways don't invalidate what God has made reality in the spiritual realms. Look at 12:15-16, "Now if the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason stop being part of the body." Even if you don't think you are a part of the body or don't want to be a part of the body, the reality is that you are! This is the factual, spiritual, ontological reality, whether you like it or not. If you believe in Jesus, he has connected you to his body!

So here is the take home, this is where it really comes to impact our lives: be a fully engaged, participating, dynamic part of the body. This is the application where if you are really listening to God's Word, your life might begin to look different. Here is what I know about 50% of you. You don't just show up to church, listen for an hour and then go home; you find a way to engage and participate. You know the gifts God has given you, you've found a need in our body, and the Holy Spirit is using you and your gifts to build up the body, bring glory to God and connect people to Jesus. You are loving kids, discipling teenagers, shepherding your lifegroup, welcoming guests, leading us in worship, financially supporting ministry initiatives. About half of this church is fully engaged, participating in the work God has called us to. We have 1,031 adults who serve at least every other week. That's a lot, roughly 50% of our people. One half. You are doing it. The other 50%, frankly, are not. I am not here to twist your arm, I am not here to give you a guilt trip, I am not here to prod you. But I do think that God might be trying to

speak to you today, to give you a beautiful picture of what he has designed and allow you to say, “Today is the day—I am going to draw a line in the sand and do whatever it takes to truly get engaged.”

I know there are tons of obstacles that could keep people from engaging. I’ve had conversations with people about this for the last twenty years. Here are the top reasons people have:

- Unawareness—I didn’t know I was supposed to be more engaged.
- Busy-ness—I don’t know how I could fit it into my schedule.
- Disinterest—Frankly, I’m just not that interested in it.
- Individualism—I’m fine on my own.
- Insecurity—I don’t believe I have anything to offer.
- Pride—I’m better than these people.
- Self-protectiveness—I’ve been hurt before and am not about to let that happen again.
- Suspicion—I don’t think I can trust others.
- Selfishness—I’m not willing to give what it takes to be invested.

We can come up with all sorts of reasons why we aren’t a fully engaged, participating, dynamic part of the body, but the reality of the matter is most of the reasons are excuses, and we know it. This hasn’t happened in the last few months, but I can’t tell you the number of people I ran into in 2021 and 2022 out in public. I’d see them at a busy restaurant or a friend’s birthday party or a ball game and we’d catch up and I’d say, “I haven’t seen you at church in a while.” The response would be, “We’re still watching at home. We haven’t felt safe quite yet.” I’m like, “You can come to Lucas Oil Stadium but you can’t come to church?” It was an excuse. You know it, I know it. Stop making excuses and start getting engaged!

When I talk to people about potentially joining our church, I always tell them, “I hope that God does some incredible things in your life through this place. I believe The Creek will bless you and enrich your walk with God, but I also know that if God calls you to his church, then there are blessings God wants to give this church through you. You will receive from the ministry of this body and we will receive from the ministry you offer.” That’s how God designed the church to work. Every single person in this church needs to be able to answer this question: “How am I loving, serving, and using my God-given gifts to engage with and build up the church that God has called me to?” Every person needs to know the answer to this question. Again, I think this will encourage about half of you because you are living this out. You are doing this. It’s inspiring. You are growing because of it. Our church is growing because of it. And most importantly, God is glorified because of it. For others, this isn’t so much encouraging as it is challenging. Some of you have been just coming to church, sitting down for an hour and then peacing out. That is not how God designed this thing to work! That is not how God designed your relationship with him to work, that is not how God designed the church to work, that is not how God designed his kingdom to work. God wants every person to be a fully engaged, participating, dynamic part of the body of Christ who is loving others, serving others, and ensuring that the body is growing, striving to look more and more and more like Jesus. He wants you to engage with your church in such a way that if you are gone for more than a few weeks, we know it, we feel it, we miss you. In order to be the church God has called us to be, in order for us to carry out the mission God had given us, every single person needs to be engaged!

This is a great reminder about the beauty and importance of having a close group of friends you meet with at church. You’re never going to deeply know a couple thousand people, but you can deeply know a couple dozen. We were in lifegroup on Wednesday, talking about Emerson’s sermon from last week about walking in the power of the Spirit and using spiritual gifts. As we were discussing it I said, “Let’s take fifteen minutes and identify the spiritual gifts we have seen on display in each other’s lives and then, after identifying them, say specifically how our lives are better and richer and more centered on Christ

because of benefiting from each other's spiritual gifting." It was such a beautiful time; several tears were shed. I was crying. That was only able to happen because we are all at church every Sunday, and everyone serves at this church. And we meet every Wednesday and serve one another in our homes. It's not just, "I believe in Christ." It's, "I am a fully engaged, participating, dynamic part of the body. And I am showing up in a consistent, meaningful way that is making a difference." That's what God wants for every one of us. Nothing less.

I began the message by talking about the 4000 people required to make Star Wars: The Force Awakens. Four thousand people, everyone using their unique, strategic gifts and talents to bring together an epic story of good and evil with the fate of the galaxy resting in the balance. The same is true of the church, but it's not a story; it's real life. There is actual good and actual evil in this world. Because of what God has accomplished through the person of Jesus Christ, we know the fate of the universe is sealed: God will one day come and put all things right. But we have a role to play in the unfolding drama. The way we play the role brings glory to God, changes lives, and shapes eternity. God has handed us the script. He's waiting for us to read and decide if we are going to link arms with one another, engage with one another, and play the role he's created for us.