

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-26

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

- We're in a season of new.
 - Last week: How the gospel brings us into a new relationship with God.
 - This week: How the gospel brings us into a new relationship with each other.
- Let's give our attention to one of the most important texts on this topic: **1 Cor 12:12-26**.

INTRODUCTION¹

Isaac and Teresa Vatin grew up in Argentina. They began a courtship, writing letters to each other three times a week, before marrying in 1947. In 1968 they moved to Chicago where they lived full and productive lives – they learned English, bought a home, had three children, worked hard to put them through college, had grandchildren, and grew old.

After 69 years of marriage, Isaac and Teresa died of natural causes – within an hour of each other. Isaac held his bride's hand as she passed away peacefully, then, just 40 minutes later, he died too – still holding her hand.

At their joint funeral the comment was made: "They were always in love, literally to the end."

Isn't that a great story? A life of intimate friendship, where neither party ever left the other alone. But for many of us, life doesn't always have such a happy glow.

Former Surgeon General Vivek Murthy said that the greatest public health crisis in America today isn't cancer or heart disease. It's isolation – loneliness and the effects of being socially disconnected.²

The impact of isolation on physical health is staggering: dementia, high blood pressure, alcoholism, depression and a variety of other ills become more prevalent when we are lonely.³ Researchers at Brigham Young University even calculated that loneliness is as potent a cause of early death as smoking fifteen cigarettes a day.⁴

Loneliness is killing us – literally. But the Bible presents a better vision – not a life of isolation but a people who **Live Deeply** together.

Transition: Let's get into our text.

CONTEXT⁵

1 Corinthians is a letter written by Paul to the church in Corinth, a city you can still visit in Greece today. Paul had planted this church – you can read about that in Acts 18 – and he cared for it deeply. Now, he's writing to them because they're in trouble. As a city, Corinth was known for its **materialism, sexual immorality, and corruption**. But surprisingly, Paul isn't concerned about any of that. Instead, he's worried about the **divisions** that have started to form within the church. Factions and groups have emerged as people argue over various issues in church life. Paul's concern is sobering: Church, remember that for us internal division is much more

dangerous than any external threat. Danger from without don't destroy churches; division within does that. Unity is a sign of the Spirit's presence. Division is Satan's hallmark – he loves it and he uses it to destroy churches. This is why all of our members take a vow – why we've all taken a vow – “to promote the unity, purity, and peace of the Church.” We refuse to give Satan a foothold.

It's in this context – concerned about divisions in the church – that Paul writes **V12: For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.** Think about your body, Paul says. It's made up of lots of different parts – hands and feet, chest and a back, a chin and even a belly. But all these parts – and many more – come together to form one body. That's what the church is like. All of us are different parts – different members – that together form one body. We are one.

And this isn't just a nice thought – a sweet illustration Paul uses to emphasize the importance of unity. Instead, it's a powerful truth that is grounded in the gospel. **V13: For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit.** There are differences between us – black, white; male, female; introverts, extroverts. There are nine billion people on this earth, yet none of us share the same fingerprint. But the gospel is the ultimate unifier. The same Spirit that saved us all now indwells us all.

It's a profound thought, isn't it? United to Jesus we are united to each other. If you're a Christian this morning, the same Holy Spirit that lives in me also lives in you. There's a deep connection between us. We're not just united around shared interests or even a common goal. It's deeper than that. As families share the same DNA, so we share the same Holy Spirit. As the two are one in marriage, the many are one in Christ. If you did a spiritual blood test, you'd find we're all related. To be part of the church is to be part of a family.

Transition: In this context, Paul teaches us two beautifully simple truths about our life together.

CONTENT

1. You Need Your Church Family

State: You and I are part of the same family – and we need this church family! In our culture we celebrate those who stand alone, who take on all-comers, who do it on their own. Columbus and Copernicus, Churchill and Mandela, James Bond and Frank Sinatra! And there's something to this. We want to be courageous when called upon.

But that's not where most of life takes place. We don't live in such extremes – swinging alone from one destiny defining moment to the next. In normal life – in real life – we need each other.

Paul makes this very clear in **V21: 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.”** Each part of the body is *important*, but each part of the body is also *dependent*. Eyes are great for seeing, but you can't use them to write. Heads are great for thinking, but you can't use them to walk. So it is for us: We are all important, but we are all dependent. It doesn't matter who you are, we all need other people to make us whole.

Illustrate:

The **physical** impact of close relationships has been the topic of increasing study in recent years. One such study from Harvard Medical School found:

Social connections not only give us pleasure, they also influence our long-term health in ways every bit as powerful as adequate sleep, a good diet, and not smoking. Dozens of studies have shown that people who have social support from family, friends, and their community are happier, have fewer health problems, and live longer.⁶

Similar studies have discovered that connecting with others literally lowers our blood pressure⁷ and reduces activity in the part of the brain that registers anxiety.⁸ From top to bottom, inside and out, we need other people.

Here, the Bible teaches us that the same thing is true **spiritually**: You need your church family.

I know this is true for me. I came to faith in the church. I have been sustained through ups and downs by the church. In my moments of struggle and personal heartbreak the church has strengthened me to face another day. I come here and my physical and spiritual blood pressure lowers. The part of my soul that registers anxiety is calmed.

Apply: Perhaps you feel the same way. What has the church meant to you? What difference has it made to your life?

V26 says: **If one member suffers, all suffer together.** Have you experienced that? Through failed tests, breakups, infertility, unemployment, stress, cancer, and loss. Have you found people who weep with you when you weep?

V26 continues: **If one member is honored, all rejoice together.** Have you experienced that? Through birthdays, graduations, promotions, engagements, pregnancies, and all the rest. Have you found people who laugh with you when you rejoice?

I pray that's the kind of church we are – and the kind of church we'll continue to be. A spiritual family. The place where your physical and spiritual blood pressure lowers. The place where the part of your soul that registers anxiety is calmed.

None of us are designed to make it alone. It doesn't matter who you are, we all need other people to make us whole. Point 1: You Need Your Church Family.

2. Your Church Family Needs You

State: Family is a gift, but it is also a responsibility. It's a blessing to us, and we're to be a blessing to it.

Back to **V21:** **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."** The body needs all its different parts – each part plays a vital role. We can't amputate the hands, the feet, or any part if we want to remain whole.

In the same way, when we step back from participating, when we remove ourselves from the church family, we amputate all we have to offer; the body of Christ is left less whole.

Illustrate:

You might think, “I’m not sure I have much to offer?” But the Bible says that you do. **V22: the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.** Everyone has a part to play.

I remember a friend saying to me during a discouraged moment, “I feel like a toenail on the body of Christ.” “Sure,” I replied, “but have you ever lost a toenail? Don’t leave this church hobbling through life.”

Apply: This perspective provides a compelling way to think about our church family.

It honors the role each of us has to play. But it also breaks us out of that consumer mindset – which is common in our world, but also sadly common in the church.

Of course we can ask, “What can I *get* from this place?” Our church should be a place where you are fed and encouraged, where you are built up and equipped, where you find a spiritual home whether you want to laugh or weep.

But the church is also a place where we ask, “What can I *give*?” The gospel frees us from self-centered thinking, it pulls us out of ourselves and enables us to focus on others. And life is always better when we’re focused on serving others.

Look around you at your fellow church members, even those sitting beside you in the pews. Assume there’s much more going on in their lives than what you see on Sunday morning. Some of it’s good, some of it’s bad, and some of it’s ugly. That’s okay. This is a place where you can come as you are. But that means it’s also a place where we seek to help each other. You come to come to church for your own sake, but you also come for others too.

You need your church family, and your church family needs you.

Transition: What might it look like to put these truths into practice this week? How can we be a healthy family this week?

- My encouragement is to take one small step.
- I’ve brainstormed a bunch of options – seven of them! – to do just that.
 - As I share, consider which one jumps out.
 - Which one could you try this week?

CONSEQUENCE

1. Go to Our Connections Event: If you’re new to Cedar Springs or haven’t found your place yet, we’re want to help you make this place your spiritual home. Our Connections Event is more than just an introduction to our ministries; it’s an invitation to become part of our family. All our ministries will be represented, and we want you to meet the people who are eager to walk alongside you, share your journey, and help you find a place where you feel at home.

2. **Introduce Yourself to Someone New:** Make it your goal to introduce yourself to at least one person this morning. It could be someone you've seen for years – you may even feel bad that you don't know their name; or it might be a completely new face. But don't leave this week without making a connection. We all need to feel seen, and you can be the one who makes a difference for someone today.
3. **Reach Out to Someone You Haven't Seen in a While:** Is there someone you used to see here but haven't seen recently? Why not call them or send them a text? Maybe they've just been at a different service, or maybe they've fallen through the cracks. Check in on them, see how they're doing, and see if they'd like to catch up. This small step could mean a lot.
4. **Make Peace with Someone:** If there's tension in your life – with a family member or someone you were once close to – be the one to make the first move. This isn't easy. Life is full of misunderstanding, betrayal, and pain. But we have Jesus. And we want to reconcile with each other before he comes again.
5. **Go Deeper with Your Friends:** After church, or in your Sunday School or small group, take the time to ask each other about the highs and lows of the week. If someone is struggling, listen, hold it with them, and offer to pray. If someone is celebrating, join in their joy, cheer them on, and give thanks. These intentional moments take us deeper into life together.
6. **Consider What You Need to Get:** When you join our gatherings, come with a heart ready to receive. Ask yourself, "What does my soul need today?" Be present, attentive, and open to how God might be speaking to you here. If you know what you need, reach out and let us know – let this be a season where your church family serves you!
7. **Consider What You Can Give:** How can you bless others in our church family? Whether it's through serving, leading, mentoring, or simply being present, we need your contribution. Ask yourself, "Where can I make a difference?" (If you're not sure, head on over to our connections event!) When you give of yourself, you help make this the church we all want.

THE CLOSE

- I've given you a buffet, you choose a dish – one of these or something else.
- What simple will you take? Say the next yes.

You need your church family, and your church family needs you.

CONCLUSION

Let me close with a quote:

The challenge today is to find wholeness right where we are – in the world, amid broken and divided souls like us, and in imperfect churches with imperfect pastors and imperfect singing and imperfect community. The challenge is to move into dark places, both in our own hearts and in our own communities, and bring them light.

Commit to this family:

- I can't promise you'll fall in love – like Isaac and Teresa Vatin holding hands.
- But I am sure you'll build new relationships – where you can be loved and love.

RESOURCES AND ENDNOTES

Resources

This list contains some of the resources that were used to prepare this sermon series. Check them out if you want to dig a little deeper.

- Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*.
- Chuck DeGroat, *Wholeheartedness*.
- Donald MacLeod, *Joy Changes Everything*.
- Jackie Hill Perry, *Well-Intentioned Sin Is Still Sin and Deserves Judgment*.

Endnotes

¹ Story taken and quotes from [this article](#), accessed 8/15/24.

² See interview, [accessed here](#) on 4/25/17.

³ See [this article](#), accessed 8/15/24.

⁴ See [this article](#), accessed 4/25/17.

⁵ See the introduction to 1 Corinthians in *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Crossway Bibles, 2016); and the entry on “Corinth” in M. G. Easton, *Illustrated Bible Dictionary and Treasury of Biblical History, Biography, Geography, Doctrine, and Literature*, 160.

⁶ See [this article](#), accessed 8/15/24.

⁷ See [this article](#), accessed 8/15/24.

⁸ See [this article](#), accessed 8/15/24.