

Shapes for Living

Week 1: Relating. Bible study leaders notes

Bible study - One Body with Many Members

We will look at 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 using 'The Message' Bible translation. It would help if each member of the group has a Bible or copy of the passage; you might want to have available a print-out of the passage on an A4 sheet of paper:

¹²⁻¹³ "Your body has many parts—limbs, organs, cells—but no matter how many parts you can name, you're still one body. It's exactly the same with Christ. By means of his one Spirit, we all said goodbye to our partial and piecemeal lives. We each used to independently call our own shots, but then we entered into a large and integrated life in which *he* has the final say in everything. Each of us is now a part of his resurrection body, refreshed and sustained at one fountain—his Spirit—where we all come to drink. The old labels we once used to identify ourselves—labels like Jew or Greek, slave or free—are no longer useful. We need something larger, more comprehensive.

¹⁴⁻¹⁸ I want you to think about how all this makes you more significant, not less. A body isn't just a single part blown up into something huge. It's all the different-but-similar parts arranged and functioning together. If Foot said, "I'm not elegant like Hand, embellished with rings; I guess I don't belong to this body," would that make it so? If Ear said, "I'm not beautiful like Eye, limpid and expressive; I don't deserve a place on the head," would you want to remove it from the body? If the body was all eye, how could it hear? If all ear, how could it smell? As it is, we see that God has carefully placed each part of the body right where he wanted it.

¹⁹⁻²⁴ But I also want you to think about how this keeps your significance from getting blown up into self-importance. For no matter how significant you are, it is only because of what you are a *part* of. An enormous eye or a gigantic hand wouldn't be a body, but a monster. What we have is one body with many parts, each its proper size and in its proper place. No part is important on its own. Can you imagine Eye telling Hand, "Get lost; I don't need you"? Or, Head telling Foot, "You're fired; your job has been phased out"? As a matter of fact, in practice it works the other way—the "lower" the part, the more basic, and therefore necessary. You can live without an eye, for instance, but not without a stomach. When it's a part of your own body you are concerned with, it makes *no* difference whether the part is visible or clothed, higher or lower. You give it dignity and honor just as it is, without

comparisons. If anything, you have more concern for the lower parts than the higher. If you had to choose, wouldn't you prefer good digestion to full-bodied hair?

²⁵⁻²⁶ The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part, the parts we mention and the parts we don't, the parts we see and the parts we don't. If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance."

Read the passage aloud

Invite members of the group to share a particular thought, or a phrase or word that struck them as it was being read. If time allows, read the passage again.

For discussion

Paul says the 'weakest' or less 'special' parts are often them most important and need special care. Can you think of examples of this in our physical bodies – perhaps when things have gone wrong and needed treatment?

Paul offers this parable of the body to a church that was very divided and was not treating people with equal honour and value. Can we think of times in our communities when that has tended to happen? What kinds of things lead to communities being divided up like that – honouring some, judging or neglecting others?

As the group explores this beware of people simply moaning or complaining – as if the problem lies with other people. We need to listen sensitively to people expressing hurt. But we also need to take responsibility for the ways we can make a difference – rather than blaming others.

Please also ask people to respect confidences shared in the room and not tell them to anyone else.

Different versions of the Bible may say slightly different things – use different words or phrase things differently. Do not discourage this as a discussion point, as some interesting insights might come out of exploring the text in this way.

Some questions for leading the discussion:

If we think of our communities as a body with many parts. are there people and places we tend to neglect or treat with less importance?

Are there parts of what Paul is saying that feel particularly challenging or difficult in our communities?

In what ways do our Christian communities illustrate Paul's life a body in our society?

Are there ways you feel we might be expressing this more fully? Can you think of examples?

Can you think of parts of body of our society that are being neglected or devalued in our community? How could we make a difference?

Gathering and closing prayers:

In the light of what you have discussed it might help to agree particular things to pray for.

We pray for ... name a part of your community - a group, organisation, shops, streets, schools or businesses.

We pray for ... name individuals who are in your prayers.

We pray for ... ourselves, inviting The Holy Spirit into our thoughts and hearts.

Each prayer might conclude with this refrain:

If one flourishes, all flourish

We praise you, for we are fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139)