

To Own My God-Given Gifts

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The human body is wondrous.

Take the diaphragm for instance.

The diaphragm is the muscle that sits just below your heart and lungs. When it contracts, it moves downward creating room, and your lungs inflate. When it relaxes, it moves upward, and you exhale. Just because I made you think about your diaphragm, you're now thinking about breathing. But even when you stop thinking about it, you keep breathing. If you sleep six hours tonight, your diaphragm will work 5,400 times. All on its own. That's just one of the many amazing parts in the human body.

Life without one part of your body—even your pinky finger—is different.

Your pinky is all about power. You use your thumb, index finger, and middle finger for precision. Think about holding a nail on a spot on the wall. But you use your palm, thumb, ring finger, and pinky finger for power. Think of holding a hammer to hit that nail. Your pinky gives your grip much of its power.¹ So you can survive without your pinky finger, but shaking a hand or picking up a suitcase will be tougher.

The body helps us understand the Church.

Paul describes the Church as being like a body. The body helps us understand our relationship with Jesus. In Ephesians chapter 1, Paul says that Jesus is the head and the Church is His body—He leads, and we follow. In Romans 12, Paul tells us that we belong to each other. He writes in **Romans 12:5**,

... so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

Here, in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul tells us that the body helps us to understand how we fit in the Church and in God's mission to build His Kingdom. We are important parts of the body while still being individuals.

Bodies help us understand our calling.

Each one of us has gifts that are given to us by God. We have spiritual gifts, like helping people; things that move our hearts, like broken families; abilities we have picked up along the way, like accounting; unique personalities that may make us a steady kind of friend; and experiences, like our time in Bulgaria, that shape us. This is where calling gets extremely personal. We are called by God to know our gifts and use them for His glory and Kingdom. The body of Christ is where all these gifts fit and come to life. We are each like the diaphragm—wondrously made. We are each like pinky fingers—more important to the whole than we realize.

In a body, all the parts are connected.

We join the body of Christ when we become disciples of Jesus.

¹ <https://vinepair.com/cocktail-chatter/pinkie-provides-half-hand-strength/>

Paul connects this moment to baptism in verse 13. He doesn't mean that baptism magically makes us part of the Church. We become Christians when we accept salvation in Jesus and declare our loyalty to Jesus. Baptism is the natural, public declaration of that moment. So, when we become Christians, we are connected to the one body and to everyone else in the body through God's one Holy Spirit. Paul explains the connection itself in **1 Corinthians 12:12**,

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.

We need one another; collaboration isn't optional in the body of Christ.

Collaboration is working together like on a team, and we tend to think of collaborating as optional. It may even slow us down. But none of us has everything we need. In **1 Corinthians 12:17** Paul paints a compelling picture of how connected we really are,

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?

In his picture, we are each an individual part of the body, and Paul is putting a good question in front of us. Say you are like an eye. You may think of yourself as the all-seeing, all-sufficient eye. But Paul asks—what if the eye were all you had? Where would the hearing be? Where would the smell be? More practically, where would the lungs and lips be? Suddenly, we realize that we can't do without each other. Collaboration isn't just a good idea; it's absolutely necessary.

Our connectedness busts up our natural pride and need to be the Lone Ranger.

The Lone Ranger is the person who operates alone, taking down evil and making the world a better place. The Lone Ranger is the rugged individualist. But the Lone Ranger is a myth. The Lone Ranger had his trusty horse, Silver, and his friend, Tonto, who saved his life and fought right beside him. Paul says that there are no Lone Rangers. That hurts our pride, but pride isn't a virtue. It's a sin, and it's deadly, so hurting our pride is a good thing. We are all connected to a bigger body, and we need the other members of that body.

God did that intentionally!

God made us each to be different, He gave us different gifts, and then He put us in the body of Christ in just the right place on purpose. **1 Corinthians 12:18** says,

But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.

Which means that you are in the body and you are made to do what you are made to do by God's own power and plan. Let that sink in for just a moment today.

For me, Launching Brookwood Community Church was an exercise in humility, teamwork, and the connectedness of the body of Christ.

Brookwood was the church Tammi and I helped plant in Minnesota. As the church planter, I was convinced that it was up to me to plant the church. Not a healthy thought, I know. But I ran into reality very quickly because planting a church is more than one person can do. And by God's grace, I was surrounded by a team of amazing people. There was Glenn who could not only paint but was an actuary and could handle money and policy. There was Lisa who led the Children's Ministry. Matt pulled together the worship-arts team and led music. Deb kept us all in line. John and Colleen told

everyone they knew about the new church. And the list goes on and on. It was a picture of how connected we are in the body of Christ. And a thriving church was the result.

In a body, all the parts are valuable.

God addresses lungs and spleens and all the body parts that seem weak.

You'd be tempted to think that they are less important, but Paul writes in **1 Corinthians 12:22**,

On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable ...

He's talking about our internal organs. Things like our lungs and spleens. Sure, they seem weak at first glance. But make no mistake! They are necessary. We need to breathe and digest food. These seemingly weaker body parts are indispensable!

Do you feel like that weaker part of the body today?

You may feel weaker because you doubt the value of your gifts, you doubt that what you do is important in the grand scheme of things. Or you may be questioning your gifts. Or you may be hurting and wondering whether you will ever be able to use your gifts again. Paul says that you may be the beating heart, pumping blood to the body, or the nerves that keep us all connected to Christ the head. The seemingly weaker parts of the body are vital to the body.

The team that went to Istanbul earlier this summer asked this question.

Our team went to serve the church planters of our partner agency in the region. We were there to teach, listen, share life, and make life better for them. Leading up to the trip, several members of the team asked, "Why am I going on this trip?" They wondered what they brought to the table. Even as late as the first day of the conference, people were asking that question. As we each did what we came to do, eyes in the room lit up. Connections got made. By the end of the trip, we all knew why we were there and how our gifts mattered. We were the body of Christ doing what we were made to do.

As a body, we all share the wins, the losses, the work, and life together.

We don't just work together. We belong together. Paul writes in **1 Corinthians 12:26**,

If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

As much as we are talking about gifts and contributions to the body of Christ, this is the inescapable truth. We are brothers and sisters to each other—not because of our value but because of what Jesus has done for us. We share something much deeper than work.

It's time to admit your own value and the value of everyone around you.

If you're having a tough time admitting your own value, then it's probably easy for you to see the value in the people around you. You may wish God made you to sing like Talia Hart or teach like Jeff Partridge or manage like Kevin Haskins. But God wants you to see your value too, and that means trusting Him. God made you, and He didn't make a mistake.

In a body, all the parts have a purpose.

Paul pushes us all to think deeply about the purpose of our gifts.

Look at what Paul actually writes in **1 Corinthians 12:28**,

And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.

Paul gives lists like this in at least four different places. Sometimes we read them to make a definitive list of spiritual gifts. But I think that misses Paul's point and misses the blessings of each list being a little different from the others. Paul is saying that God has poured out His Holy Spirit on His people, and that means we have gifts for doing ministry. All those gifts are given by God for a purpose, and that should lead us to ask—what is that purpose?

All the gifts God gives to the members of the body serve Jesus' mission.

This fact is clearer in **Ephesians 4:12-13** where Paul directly addresses the point of at least some of the spiritual gifts. They are given,

... to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ ...

God is building His Kingdom. Jesus is making disciples and advancing the Gospel. That's Jesus' mission, and God gives us our gifts so that we can join His mission.

Good news has been right under the surface this whole time—God called you!

God has called you to Himself. He has called you to be disciples and to make disciples. He has called you to a particular location to be and make disciples. And He has given you specific gifts for joining His mission. God has called you! Knowing that you are God-called and that your gifts are God-given should make you stand a little bit taller.

God called Lance Orton to Himself and then to ministry in Portland, Oregon.

In 2018, Orton came to City Team in Portland, Oregon, looking for a bed. He was addicted to heroin, and the car he had been living in had just been stolen. Detoxing took him weeks. He said, "I wanted to die. You're feeling pins and needles, you're freezing cold yet sweating hot at the same time, there's a complete reversal of all your bodily functions ... it's really not a pretty sight." It was one of the toughest experiences of his life. But he stuck with it. He entered City Team an atheist and God saved him in the process. Then he became part of the team. Today, he is the executive director of City Team in Portland.² His experience makes him a better, more compassionate, but also more committed and wiser executive director. He has gifts, and he is a gift.

God calls us for His purpose, not ours.

We aren't given gifts and a calling to make us look big or to swell our already-inflated pride. Nor are we given gifts to hide them and use them for ourselves. We are given gifts and called to use them to make more disciples and build the Kingdom of God. God gives the gifts, He gives the calling, and He gets the glory.

Let's use our God-given gifts.

God gives us these gifts because He is so, so good!

² <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2024/11/oregon-drug-decriminalization-portland-ministries-recovery/>

Let's take a step back for just a moment today and let what we're saying sink in. And marvel. He made the planets to spin around the sun and set galaxies in motion by a word. He causes the sun to shine on earth, He raised the mountains up, He causes the rain to fall, and He filled the oceans. He was already infinitely good. But now, He sees you. He made you. He saves you through Jesus Christ. He gives you gifts and invites you into His mission. How astoundingly good He is!

God's goodness fills us up and overflows in our calling.

For just a moment, picture goodness as being like water. God pours all of that goodness into us—life, forgiveness, new life, His Holy Spirit, and gifts. That goodness from God just keeps welling up inside of us, but He doesn't stop pouring. What overflows is our calling, and our calling is meant to be like the goodness of God overflowing and flooding other lives.

We have a generous God, so we are generous with our gifts.

That's one of the basic rhythms of the Christian life. It applies to our treasure. It also applies to our time and our talents—our gifts. God has been generous with us, so we are generous with others! We share the smile that God has given us. We use that engineering degree we worked so hard to complete. We take the confusion we felt when we were a first-time dad and use it to help someone else. We are stewards of our gifts, using them for God's glory. Doing that changes the world, and it changes us.

You should see the smiles at Summer Bible Club!

Every summer, kids from the region come here to Valley for a one-week extravaganza. There's dancing and singing, the building looks like an off-Broadway set, kids are playing games, crafts are drying, and snacks are flowing. I say that you should see the smiles, and I do mean the smiles on the faces of the kids, but there are smiles on the faces of most of the workers, too. Because they are using their gifts, and eternities are changing. Kids are praying. Decisions are being made that will someday lead to kids going to Indonesia on mission. The week is amazing, and the follow-up is even better. Later in the summer, kids who chose to follow Jesus for the first time are being baptized, and we are all cheering at the top of our lungs and clapping like it's the Superbowl. All because dozens and dozens of volunteers said "yes" to God's calling and decided to use their gifts.

God gives us gifts, and He calls us to use them.

The gifts aren't the calling itself, but they point us to our calling. The calling is to put those gifts to use in a particular place to make a profound difference. The calling could be to help single moms write budgets that balance as a way to show them the love of God. It could be to teach children music so they can praise Him as they grow. It could be to sit with the families of dying people and help them find hope in the midst of loss. God's calling on each of us is unique and important. When we say "yes" to God's calling, He will advance His Gospel through us. Say "yes" to God's calling in your life.