

FINDING YOUR PLACE IN THE CHURCH

A **MANNAHOUSE** RESOURCE



INTRODUCTION

Forty days after His resurrection, Jesus ascended bodily to be with the Father — but He did not leave! His life and ministry is deposited in all those who join themselves to Him through faith. He continues to orchestrate and administrate His plan of redemption for the human race through the church which is also called His body (Eph. 1 :22, 23).

Every believer, at the time of conversion, becomes a member of the body of Christ. Each one of us is a vital member of this divinely structured group of people. We all have a place in the body of Christ and are called to contribute to its growth and ministry. When we discover and accept our place, we receive a fulfillment and peace. **This booklet examines the purposes and ministries of the body of Christ and concludes by giving some helpful tips to finding your place within it.**

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WHAT IS THE BODY OF CHRIST?

“And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:22, 23).

The body of Christ and the church are one and the same. Both terms represent those individuals who have been saved by receiving Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. The term “church” is the Greek word “ekklesia” meaning “called out”. It refers to those who have been called out of the world into citizenship in the kingdom of God (Col.1:13). The term “body of Christ” has reference to the organic union between the Lord Jesus and the total company of believers that are joined to Him.

At conversion, every believer is born again by the Holy Spirit who enters our hearts and makes our body the temple of God (Gal. 4:6; I Cor. 6: 19). Simultaneously, by the same spirit we are all baptized into the body of Christ (I Cor. 12:13). **Each of us are included as an individual part of the many membered body of Christ of which Jesus is the head.**

By describing the body of Christ as the “*fullness of Him*” in Ephesians 1:23, the Lord is communicating the inseparable union and complete identification He has with His people. Through the incarnation, Jesus shared in our humanity as the second Adam and forever linked Himself to us in what we might term a spiritually organic relationship (I Cor. 15:45).

Just as Christ shared in our humanity through actual experience, we, likewise, must commit ourselves to a tangible participation in His body. **We are members of the universal body of Christ, consisting of every believer who has ever lived, but we must also become faithful, contributing members of a local expression of His body through involvement in a church.** It is through the practical commitment of each member to one another, in the will of God, that Christ’s purposes with His body will be fulfilled.

EVERYONE HAS A PLACE

“For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ.” (Rom. 12:4, 5).

Our physical body consists of many parts, from kidneys to fingers and from bone marrow to eyeballs. Every part is absolutely essential in order for our body to function properly. So also is the body of Christ. There are many members, each with his own place and contribution, yet only one body. **We each differ in respective talents, abilities, and areas of ministry, but we are all necessary and important.**

Every christian has been specifically created, gifted, and graced for a unique place of contribution and service. I Corinthians 12: 18 tells us that *“God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.”* **Finding our place in the body requires that we acknowledge the fact that we each have a special place and that we should be willing to accept the unique position which God has given us.**

There are two reactions described in I Corinthians 12 that interfere with the unity and function of the body of Christ:

- 1. Insecurity** In I Corinthians 12:15 Paul humorously describes the foot, in insecurity, denying its place in the body because it is not the hand. The lesson is obvious: a foot lacks the visibility, creativity, and dignity of the hand and would therefore be the one that tended to insecurity. Many saints who lack distinct gifts or public ministry tend toward the same reaction. We must not allow insecurity or jealous comparison to cause us to depreciate our function or keep us from accepting our place in the body.
- 2. Pride** In I Corinthians 12:21 Paul pictures the eye proudly rejecting the hand by saying, *"I have no need of you."* We are *"individually members of one another"* (Rom. 12:5), and must acknowledge the value of every person's place. This is especially important for those with a more obvious gift ministry.

EVERYONE HAS A GIFT

“And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability” (Matt. 25: 15).

Jesus related the parable of the talents to convince each of us that we have gifts, talents, and abilities that are to be invested in His work. This parable also includes these essential points.

- 1. We All Have Natural Abilities** – God created each one of us as a unique person. We were born with certain natural interests and aptitudes. Some are musically inclined, some are mathematically gifted. Some love working with children, while others have carpentry or mechanical skills. Your natural abilities and inclinations are not a coincidence. You were specifically designed for God’s purposes: *“we are His workmanship”* (Eph. 2:10.) The Lord equips us for our service and calling according to our *“own ability”* (Matt. 25:15).

2. **God Graces Our Natural Ability** – In this parable, the talents given by Christ represent God’s grace (special endowment for service) being poured upon our natural abilities. These natural abilities, energized by the Spirit of God, then become gifts to the body of Christ. We are told in Romans 12:6 *“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them.”* Without the special endowment of God’s grace on our natural abilities, we will not profit His purposes. Jesus describes this relationship in John 15:5: *“He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”*
3. **We Must Be Faithful** – The major point of the talents is that God requires us to be faithful with our gifts and callings: *“Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful”* (1 Cor. 4:2, K.J.V.). Those that wisely invested their talents were commended with *“Well done, good and faithful servant”* (Matt. 25:21). The one who hid his talents was rebuked and his talent was given to another. God desires our fruitfulness through faithfulness.

OUR GIFTS ARE MEASURED

“But to each of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (Eph. 4:7).

The Holy Spirit was given without measure to Jesus *“For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily”* (Col. 2:9). He is the head of the body and *“of His fullness we have all received”* (Jn. 1: 16). The body of Christ consists of many members, each with gifts and talents that have been measured to them. As we find our place, invest our gifts, and receive each other’s ministry, we grow to *“a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”* (Eph. 4: 13). **The measure of our gift is seen in the quality, scope, and effectiveness of it in relationship to God’s purposes.** The following are four considerations concerning the measure of our gift:

- 1. Relate To Your Gift Realistically** – We need a realistic appraisal of our gifts and abilities. Romans 12 :3 teaches a man *“not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.”*

2. **The Measure of Your Gift Can Increase** - The present measure of our gift can increase in quality, scope, and effectiveness in time. God rewards faithfulness and diligence. In the parable of the pounds, those who invested theirs received more in proportion to their initiative even though each was initially given only one talent (Lk. 19: 11-26).
3. **Don't Step Beyond Your Measure** - Paul said, "*We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us*" (II Cor. 10:13). Our participation and service should always be aligned with God's grace and calling. Do not step into areas of ministry where the gift is either lacking, insufficient, or non-existent.
4. **Do Not Measure Yourself by Yourself** - Those using only themselves or a select group of close peers for their standard of measurement are not wise (II Cor. 10-12). A more valid estimation of our gifts and abilities can be derived through a broader comparison of other ministries and functions in the larger body of Christ. A healthy contact, interaction, and exposure to other ministries helps give us balance and definition. It also positively provokes us and stimulates refinement in our progress and development in ministry.

OUR GIFTS ARE FOR SERVING

“For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who servers? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves” (Lk. 22:27).

Jesus was nearing the time of His crucifixion. He had demonstrated the power and character of the kingdom of God to His disciples for over three years. Yet at the last supper a dispute arose among them as to who would be the greatest after He left. The above words spoken by Jesus were meant as both a rebuke and a teaching. It was essential that the disciples recognize that those who represent Jesus do so with the motive to serve.

Jesus is among His body as one who serves. **Our gifts and callings are for the purposes of serving others and building up the body of Christ.** We naturally receive a sense of usefulness and fulfillment whenever our gifts provide a contribution to others. The scriptures remind us of the source of our abilities: *“What do you have that you did not receive?”* (1 Cor. 4:7). We must become servants and do what we do for the glory of God.

INTRODUCING THE GIFTS

There are many functions and ministries necessary for the proper growth and expression of the body of Christ. The new Testament provides a listing of twenty-one of these. On the following pages we will briefly describe each of these since they provide a foundation for the majority of body ministry. Other vital ministries that are not included in these include such areas as singing, worship leading, intercession, the playing of instruments, etc.

The gifts we will define are a part of the following three categories:

- 1. The Gifts of Function** (Romans 12:6-8) - These seven gifts provide the motivation and outworking for most of the body ministries.
- 2. The Gifts of the Spirit** (I Cor. 12:8-10) - These nine gifts are manifestations of the Holy Spirit and provide a supernatural dimension to the body of Christ.
- 3. The Five-Fold Ministry** (Eph. 4:11) - These five gifts are offices given to equip and edify the body of Christ.

THE GIFTS OF FUNCTION

- 1. The Gift of Prophecy** – The gift of prophecy involves speaking under the direct unction of the Holy Spirit. It is primarily “forthtelling” under the influence of the Holy Spirit to declare with a heightened sense of inspiration and quickening the mind of God. It can include foretelling as well, though this predictive element functions more fully in the office of the prophet. The forthtelling aspect of this gift includes speaking unto “*edification and exhortation and comfort*” (I Cor. 14:3). It differs from the prophecy gift of I Corinthians 12 only by degree. The prophecy of I Corinthians 12 is a manifestation of the Spirit and may not necessarily imply a consistent, abiding, personal gift as does that of Romans 12 (Example: read Acts 21:9).
- 2. The Gift of Ministry (Service)** – The gift of service involves the motivation to serve in practical, necessary ways in order to meet a current need. Individuals with this ministry are usually responsible, willing helpers that experience a great sense of fulfillment in getting the job done. They can be a special blessing to the leadership by their responsive volunteer labor.

This gift is the incentive for the ministry of helps as seen in I Corinthians 12:28, and should be resident in those functioning as deacons (Example: read Acts 6:2, 3).

- 3. The Gift of Teaching** - The gift of teaching involves the motivation and ability to search out and expound to others the truths contained within the Word of God. The Greek word for teaching found in Romans 12 is the word "didasko" and means "instruction". Many can teach the Word of God, the gift of teaching is apparent in an individual's drive for truth and in his motivation and ability to convey it. Those with this gift can be a valuable asset in Sunday School, catechism courses, home meetings, etc. Depending upon the degree of the gift, with proper training and supervision some of these individuals may develop into the five-fold office ministry of a teacher (Example: read Acts 18:24).

4. **The Gift of Exhortation** – In the New Testament, exhortation means an appeal, an entreaty, encouragement, consolation, and comfort. To exhort is to admonish or urge someone to follow some course of action. We are all called to “*exhort one another daily*” (Heb. 3:13). However, a person with the gift of exhortation will be a concerned individual with an eye to see the area of need and the ability to communicate the proper advice, encouragement, warning, or direction to others. If the gift is there, the burden to assist others in this way will be consistent and bear fruit (Example: read Acts 2:40).

5. **The Gift of Giving** – A person with a gift of giving is one who enjoys giving financially to contribute to the advancement of the kingdom of God. This person usually has the ability to make money and in turn, gives it generously. The gift of giving is seen in its consistency and in the increase and blessing of God on the one with the gift (Example: read Acts 4:36, 37).

6. **The Gift of Leadership** - The person with this gift has the ability and motivation to lead others in accomplishing God's purposes. These individuals clearly grasp the vision of the kingdom of God and have the capacity to both inspire and guide others in establishing different areas of ministry. The gift of leadership is necessary for the function of "administrations" spoken of in I Corinthians 12:28. It must be present in the eldership of a local church. It is important for the pastoral ministry, and is essential for the office of an apostle (Example: read Acts 2: 14).
7. **The Gift of Mercy** - Those with the gift of mercy naturally identify with and feel strong empathy for those who suffer misfortune or are experiencing some type of hurt. Their sympathy leads them to acts of kindness, help, and comfort towards those in need. God is the source of all mercy (Ps. 103 :8), and He requires all of His children to be merciful (Lk. 6:36). However, this attribute is especially manifest in those with a gift of mercy (Example: read Acts 9:36).

THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

1. **The Word of Wisdom** - This involves the quickening, illumination, or impartation of divine inspiration to see, understand, and respond to life situations from God's frame of reference. It is a specific impartation given by the Spirit of God granting divine insight and understanding as to how to proceed in a given circumstance or situation (Example: read Matt. 22: 17-22).
2. **Word of Knowledge** - This is the supernatural revelation to men of some detail of the knowledge of God. It is the impartation of facts, information, and details which are humanly impossible to know. The manifestation of the word of knowledge is a direct impartation or quickening to the recipient mind of a portion of the all-knowing mind of God (Example: read John 4:18).
3. **Faith** - This gift is the God-given ability to believe Him for the impossible in a situation beyond the normal faith potential. It is the faith to accomplish specific tasks, face potentially overwhelming circumstances, or to persevere in the face of dangerous situations (Example: read Acts 27 :21-25).

4. **Gifts of Healing** – The gift of healing is the supernatural ability to minister physical healing to those who are sick or infirm. The plural “healings” in I Corinthians 12:9 may imply the idea of spiritual, emotional, mental, or psychological healing (Example: read Acts 3 :6, 7).
5. **The Working of Miracles** – A miracle is a phenomenon that is supernatural – an act which is contrary to the physical laws of nature. Miracles defy reason and transcend natural laws. This gift requires God working through individuals to perform the impossible (Example: read Acts 13: 11).
6. **Prophecy** – Prophecy is speaking under unction of the Holy Spirit. It is primarily “forthtelling” and speaking forth with a heightened sense of inspiration and quickening of the mind of God. It can include a quality of foretelling as well, though this predictive element functions more fully in the office of a prophet. Every saint is encouraged in this manifestation (I Cor. 14:1 – Example: read Acts 21 :9).

7. **Discerning of Spirits** - This gift involves the divine ability to perceive the spiritual source behind a word, motive, attitude, mood, or action in an individual or group. The spiritual source being discerned may be either heavenly, human, or demonic. This gift is manifested in the lives of all Spirit-filled believers at various times (Example: read Acts 8:20).
8. **Tongues** - The gift of different kinds of tongues is the supernatural linguistic ability to communicate in a language or languages that you are unfamiliar with. It may involve the languages of men, or the supernatural languages of angels. This gift is available to all believers (I Cor. 14:5), and is important for our spiritual edification (I Cor. 14:4 - Example: read Acts 10:45, 46).
9. **Interpretation of Tongues** - The gift of interpretation is the supernatural, spontaneous ability to interpret an utterance given in tongues into the language understood by the people present. This gift has nothing to do with a natural knowledge of languages but rather comes directly from God (Example: read I Cor. 14: 13).

THE FIVE-FOLD MINISTRY

“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists and some pastors and teachers” (Eph. 4:11).

The Apostle - The ministry of the apostle has continued throughout church history. It must be distinguished from that of the first apostles in that they were uniquely used to lay the foundation of the church and to establish the doctrines and teachings of the New Testament. Apostles were “*wise master builders*” (Cor. 3: 10), able to lay a healthy spiritual and doctrinal foundation in a local church. They are usually pioneers with a vision of “the church at large”. Church movements with a world vision often arise out of their ministry.

Apostles must be spiritual, self-sacrificing men whose ministries are witnessed by both fruit and signs (II Cor. 12: 12). They must work well with the other five-fold ministries since theirs is an administrative and co-ordinative position.

The Prophet - The New Testament prophet must have the gift of prophecy along with the “forthtelling” dimension. They speak forth the mind and will of God in a predictive, directive and oftentimes corrective message. Those recognized in this office must be mature, seasoned men, strong in the Word of God and of excellent character.

The New Testament prophet differs from that of the Old Testament in that their prophecies rest on a finished revelation. Besides this, their prophecies are to be examined and judged (I Cor. 14:29).

The Evangelist -The ministry of the evangelist is to preach the good news of Jesus Christ. Evangelists have a special burden for the lost. Besides people being saved, their ministry can be accompanied by signs and wonders (Acts 8:6, 7). Evangelists should be committed members of a local church. Their ministry to the church includes inspiring the saints in a burden for the lost and equipping them in evangelism.

The Pastor - The title “pastor” literally means “a shepherd”. The pastor is called to tend and care for the flock of God. The nature of his calling demands a broad area of ministry. He must be able to feed the flock with proper teaching from the Word of God. His character example must be above reproach. The demands of the flock also require that he raise up other shepherds to assist him.

The Teacher - The ministry of the teacher is vital to the growth and health of the church. This ministry is foundational in establishing the saints in sound doctrine as well as inspiring them to search out the precious truths contained in scripture.

The five-fold ministry teacher must have a well developed and anointed gift of teaching. His life must also be a teaching by example.

FINDING YOUR PLACE

Many Christians have a real struggle finding their “ministry”. They live anxiously and confused, waiting for God to say, “*this is the way, walk in it*” (Isa. 30:21). Remember, God has not called you to be something you are not. He wants us to be released for service in what we are. **God has made you perfectly suited for the particular ministry He has called you to.** Following are some additional tips for finding your place in the body:

1. **Submit Yourself to God’s Calling** – Jesus Christ is the head of the body. We must be willing to accept whatever place or function He has for us. Every ministry and area of service is important. You will find personal contentment when you accept the place God has for you. Remember, what God calls you to, He equips you for. It is also essential not to negatively or competitively compare your place with that of others (II Cor. 10:12). Envy and covetousness destroys our spiritual life.

2. **Give God Time** - Many Christians get ahead of God in their expectation of their place of service. In the earlier part of our Christian development, the Lord wants us to learn to know Him and His Word. He would rather us be like Mary sitting at His feet learning His Word rather than like Martha scurrying about in over-busyness (Lk. 10:40-42).
3. **Get Involved** - Once a basic foundation is laid in our life, we should get involved. There are many areas of service that all saints are called to such as prayer, witnessing, church work days, other helps, etc. We are called to general involvement. Often our experience in these activities will help reveal our interests and callings.
4. **Consider Your Abilities and Desires** - We should evaluate our talents and our abilities to realistically determine what we are qualified for. A person who is tone deaf is certainly not called to song leading. God's grace energizes our natural abilities. Strong and consistent interest or desire may also indicate a calling to an area of ministry.

5. **The Evaluation of Others** - The comments and opinions of others can give us insight into our own abilities and areas of effectiveness. Leaders can be a special help in this way as God usually gives them a sensitivity to the gifts and callings of members of the church. Personal prophecy may occasionally confirm an area of calling.
6. **Further Training and Preparation** - Once we discover our place of function and calling, we must be diligent to further prepare ourselves. We should employ those disciplines that will enhance our ability to be effective in our area of ministry. We should seek the advice of those with an established "like ministry" in our local church.
7. **Be Willing to Sacrifice** - There is a cost involved with every calling in the kingdom of God. The Lord tests our commitment and motives by our willingness to sacrificially apply ourselves. Through testings and sacrifices, our character is strengthened and God blesses with a greater anointing and effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

The Spirit of God is currently at work in the church to bring a new and deeper revelation of the body of Christ. Those sections of scripture dealing with the body have received increased interest and attention in the last few years. People have been earnestly seeking out their place of service and function. Because of this, the church is in a time of growth and fruitfulness. Along with this there has been a breaking down of man-made barriers that separate Christians from one another. We must pray that the move of God continues. The results will be a greater revelation of Jesus Christ to the world.

For further study on this area we recommend reading:

Finding Your Place in the Body of Christ, by Dick Benjamin

2626 Abbot Road

Anchorage, Alaska 99507

For a brief overview of the main points of this booklet, please re-read the boldly printed words on each page.



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