

Does Your Church Involvement Matter?
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Wasilla Bible Church
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Well, you may be wondering why Larry is not up here preaching, or why he was not up here for the Communion time. And it's a very simple thing; you see, Larry has a very busy schedule up here most of the year, and he really, really, really desires to be downstairs at least at some point. And so Larry is hanging out with a roomful of 3- and 4-year-olds right now, downstairs. He...there're very few times when he is actually able to just go ahead and serve in an area of the church outside of the pulpit, or serving Communion, things like that. And it's just somethin' that he really wants to be a part of as much as he is able. And so he said, "Ashley, here you go. I want you to preach this Sunday. And I'm gonna be down with the kids." And so that's where he is.

But what we're going to be talking about today...over the course of the summer we've been going through the Minor Prophets. Guess what? Today we're taking a break from that. Ok? We're switching up the pace a little bit. We're gonna be in 1 Corinthians 12: 12-26. As you're turning there, I wanna share a little story with you that kind of relates to what we're going to be talking about today.

You see, I was...this past week I was down in North Carolina. My brother was getting married, and so I got to go down and see my youngest brother get married. And it was a great time of celebration, everything else. When we were on our way back Charlotte, my daughter, and I...we were on the plane and we had a chance to talk to this gentleman there who was sitting next to us on the plane. We were on the plane I think for 7½ - 8 hours, somethin' like that, from Atlanta to Anchorage, non-stop. So you know, middle of the day, you're not sleeping...what are you gonna do? We ended up talking, and just sharing a little bit, and talking about faith, and Jesus, and Christianity, and what does it mean to be a Christian. And he made this comment that stuck out to me. It stuck out to me because it's a comment that I've heard on many people's lips. And it was basically this—he said, "You know, the thing is, I look at it and I can worship God or I can experience God just as easily...in fact, better...out on a trout stream with my fly rod in the mountains somewhere than I can inside a church." And to an extent, I do have to agree with him. I think probably one of the times I most experienced God's presence was in Afghanistan...there was morning sun was coming up; we were on the border on this little mountain-top expecting to...intelligence said bad guys were comin' and we might have a fight comin'. And what ended up happening was we were sitting here just waiting for the sun to come up, expecting for things to happen. But in that time, I was just so impressed with...it was like God was just saying, "I'm right here. Be still and know that I am God."

So I'm not taking issue with the fact that you can experience God or worship God or have a time of intimacy with Him outside of the church. But we are going to look at one question today. And this question...I am hoping you will come away with a very defined biblical answer by the end of the day. And this question is simply this—"Does my level of involvement in the church really matter? Does it really matter whether or not I'm here? Does it really matter or not when I am here I am involved? Does it matter?" What I would say is this...well, hang on. Before we do that, let's go ahead and read the scripture. 1 Corinthians 12:12-26. It says

For as the body is one and has many parts, and all the parts of that body, though many, are one body, so also is Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. So the body is not one part, but many.

If the foot should say, "Because I'm not a hand, I don't belong to the body," in spite of this, it still belongs to the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I'm not an eye, I don't belong to the body," in spite of this, it still belongs to the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were an ear, where would the sense of smell? But now God has placed the parts, each one of them, in the body, just as He wanted them. And if they were all the same part, where would the body be?

Now, there are many parts, yet one body. So the eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you," nor again the head to the feet, "I don't need you." On the contrary, all the more those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are necessary; and those parts of the body that we think to be less honorable, we clothe these with greater honor, and our presentable parts have a better presentation, but our presentable parts have no need of clothing. Instead, God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the less honorable so that there would be no division in the body, but that the members would have the same concern for each other. So if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it. If one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

What I would say to you is this, in response to this question—‘Does it really matter? Or, you know, it doesn’t really matter if I’m here or not, or it doesn’t really matter if I am fully engaged while I’m here with this group of people.’ This is what I would...this is my response to this question, ‘Does it matter?’ And what I would say is, yes, it matters. Why? Christianity is a personal journey, but it is *not* an *individual* journey.

You see, we confuse these two things, and I’m gonna develop this further as we go through the sermon and through this passage. But basically it’s this simple thought, ok? When I say that Christianity is a personal journey, what I mean is simply this—it’s something that no one else can do for you. It doesn’t matter what your parents think, what your children think, what your spouse thinks. It doesn’t matter what they do. It doesn’t matter what ends up happening if you go to this church or that church. It doesn’t matter which religious practices you check blocks...it doesn’t matter. What matters is whether your heart has been made right with God. And you and God are the only two who can do that. And the only way that can be done is if you come to the point where you recognize the fact that “you know what? I’m a sinner. I can’t do it. But God made it possible, even though I deserve death, God made it possible for me to be forgiven through the sacrifice of His Son. And God, I trust that that is enough.” Nobody else can place trust in God for you. You have to do it yourself. You have to trust that sacrifice yourself. It’s a very personal thing.

At the same time, it’s not an individual thing. Just as a point of illustration, it’s interesting... We often like to say that “You know, this is God’s word to me. This is God’s word to you...or to you...or to you.” Please hear me out on this, ‘cause this can really stir some things up and ruffle some feathers if you don’t hear me out. This is not God’s word to me, Ashley. This is not God’s word to you, or to you, or to you...individually. This is God’s word to His church. This is God’s word to His people, collective. I don’t know if you realize this, because oftentimes we lose it in English; but the vast majority of times that it says ‘you’ in here, it’s a plural ‘you’, because God is talking to His people, His church. This is God’s word to me only so far as I am a part, a member, of the body of Christ.

It applies to everyone as a whole. This is something that God wrote to everybody, asking them to become a part of His body, and telling them what that means. But the thing is, God designed this such that we are supposed to live life—we are supposed to pursue and follow Christ—as a community, as a body...arm-in-arm, hand-in-hand, walking life side by side. That’s the way God designed it to be. And so if we think, ‘You know what? It doesn’t matter if I’m here,’ we’re a little off.

Well, let’s talk about what Paul says. See, Paul...in 1 Corinthians 12...he uses this example of the body, the body of believers. He basically says, ‘You know what? Yeah, there’s different members of the body, and they’re all pieced together, but guess what? It’s still one body.’ Christ is the same way. If we are followers of Christ, we are His body here on earth. It doesn’t mean that I, individually, Ashley, am a body of Christ. It means that I am a member of the body.

You know, it’s interesting. There are two analogies frequently given in scripture for the body of Christ, for followers of Christ. One is the body. Two is family. This is an aside, and I’m just gonna pursue this little rabbit trail for just a second, but I can’t pass it up here—simply because it’s implied in the text, ok? There are all kinds of people who take issue with membership, or being a member of the body of believers. Because, in our minds, what we say is that gives it this feel of a club, of an organization. And I don’t want to turn church into a club. That’s a very good heart behind that, but here’s what I would say. That’s why we aren’t partners. That’s why we aren’t a part of the church. We are members.

What do you call a part of your body? It’s called a member. That’s why you...when the body is torn apart, it’s called dismemberment. What do you call a person who is a part of a family? You call them a member. You see, we have members and membership in the body simply because we recognize the fact that *we are not an organization. We are an organism.* An organization has partners, it has partnerships. It’s a non-living entity. What we recognize is the fact that we are the living entity, the body of Christ. And so, members are people who acknowledge the fact and say, ‘Yes, I identify myself with this body, and I am a part of the body of Christ.’

That’s just a sideline, a side note. But here’s the thing. The point is Paul refers to the body, and he says, ‘Guess what? We’re all part of one body,’ and so he starts getting into this. Ok? And what he starts, ends up sayin’ is, he talks to two groups of people primarily. And that’s...we’re gonna touch on these two groups real quickly here. It’s very simple, and I have a sneaking suspicion that there are many people in here who easily fit into one of these two groups. Why? Because I’ve talked to too many people...in here, and in the world, and in the community, including myself...that fit into one of these two groups. I find myself oscillating between them. And I can’t...oftentimes...it’s very rarely that I find myself right here in the middle, it seems, in between the two.

The first is this group, and as we go through this, please bear with me, ok? There may be some stuff in here...Paul gets very sarcastic, ok? And I will try to be not nearly as sarcastic, but he uses some ridiculous and some...a...and some potentially offensive analogies to make his point and to drive it home. So bear with me here. But the first is this. He talks to this group of people who basically say, 'Well, I don't really have any gifts.' And he kind of quotes the foot, and he's like, 'Oh, the foot—what good would it be for the foot to say, "Oh, I'm not a hand. I wish I were a hand."' And he's like, 'You're being ridiculous! Of course you're not a hand—you're a foot! Embrace it! Embrace your foot-ness! Ok? You're not a hand—that's ok!' Imagine if Ashley, right up here, just turned into one big hand, and all of a sudden you didn't hear anything, you didn't see anything. I'd just flop around and I'm doin' the 'Addams Family' thing, just sittin' here, crawlin' outta a box or whatever else it is. It's ridiculous!

In the same way, it's ridiculous to think we're all gonna have the same gifts. What Paul says is, he says this. He says that there's two things. If you're sitting here and you think, 'You know what? I really don't have any real gifts. I don't really have any real abilities. My experiences don't seem to matter. I'm not sitting in that role. Or I don't have that position in the church, and so I'm not really worth much, you know? It doesn't matter whether or not I'm here. It doesn't matter whether or not I do anything, because quite honestly, I don't have many gifts. And I just...I'm useless, basically.' What Paul says is, first, he says, 'Remember the fact that the body is not just one member. It's many.' We're all going to have different roles. My body would not be my body if it was just a hand. It would be a dismembered part of a body. That's all it would be. It would be...we call those 'corpses.' And Paul basically says, 'Guess what? Embrace the fact that you are going to be different. There is no cookie-cutter Christian. Embrace that, and be the best foot you can be.' That's what he says.

And second of all, he says not only that, but recognize the fact that God placed each member exactly where He wanted it. God shaped, and gifted, and gave you the experiences, and gives you the position and the role that He intends. He's made you perfect to fit within the body to do a specific job that nobody else in this body can do. That's why we're a living organism. Gee, I don't know if we really acknowledge this fact, but any time a member of our body leaves and a new member comes in, in a slight way, even though it may not be totally perceived by us, the body has just changed—God has just changed the makeup of the body. But that's the beauty of it, because we are a living organism. We continue to grow and to change, and God continues to bring somebody like yourself to fill a certain position for this time, for this place, for this need, for what He wants to do.

He goes on, and Paul addresses this second group of people. The second group of people—if you have the self-loathing people over here who say 'Man, I'm just...man, I just can't do anything,' on the other side you have this group of people who...basically they are the group of people who say, 'I am very...you know...oh yes, I am God's gift to the church. I mean, if *anybody* is God's gift to the church, it's me.' And Paul gets very sarcastic with these people, ok? What he ends up doing is this. He quotes kind of the eye, and he kind of...just a moment ago the foot was lookin' at the hand and sayin' 'Oh man, if only I were a hand. Then I would be worth something.' Now you have the eye, and he's lookin' at the hand and he's like, 'Pssst! You're just a hand. I'm the eye. Yes, I am the eye. I don't need you. *I'm the eye.*'

And Paul says that's ridiculous! I mean, what good would it be if I plucked my eye out and threw it on the ground? What good is that eye gonna do? The eye is dead. It starts to set in...it just...it isn't able to do its job any more. What good is the eye without the whole body? It's none! If you're getting' all puffed up about 'Oh yes, I filled this position,' or 'Ooh, look at my gifts, I am the eye,' Paul says, 'Guess what? You need to check it.' And he kind of makes two points here. He says you need to remember the reverse. Yeah, there are many parts, but there's just one body. Before, the people who were saying, 'Oh, I don't have any gifts,' he was saying, 'Look, there's one body but many parts. Yes, we're all part of one body, but we aren't all gonna be the same.' To *this* guy he's saying, 'Yeah, there's many parts, and you're one of the parts. So what? You're still part of the one body, the same as that hand. You aren't any better or any worse than that hand. You're just another member of the body. So don't think too highly of yourself.'

This ties more into the gentleman that I spoke with on the plane, where it's the idea that 'You know what? I am totally self-sufficient. I don't need the rest of the body. I can experience God just fine on my own. I don't need anybody else. Whether I'm there or not, it doesn't really matter. If I am there, they are blessed to have me, and they should thank me because I am the eye.' Paul says, 'Uh uh, you don't get it. If you're apart from the body, all you are is a dismembered piece of a body, where rigor mortis is setting in.'

Paul goes on, and this is where he gets particularly sarcastic. He says, 'You know what? You also need to remember that God placed each member of the body where He wants it, and He honors those who may seem least.' Ok, now listen. This is where...and I've worded this carefully here, because I don't want to quite word it quite the same way as Paul does, necessarily, I think, for this reason, ok? Basically Paul, in verses 22-24, he says

'You know what? Ok, look at our bodies. We're using the body as an analogy of the church. There are parts of our body that it would be an embarrassment for me to show you. If I had no pants on, and you saw my backside every time I turned around, or everything else, that would be an embarrassment. It would be an embarrassment. Ok, so what do we do? We end up clothing ourselves.' Now, don't get me wrong. Paul ends up saying, 'Does anybody want to get rid of their backside?' I don't think so. There are certain things that the backside takes care of that the body needs to function. Still yet, we don't sit here and parade it around and everything else. No, we cover it up. You put on your dress, your pants, whatever it is. You know, you put on your designer clothes. I don't know, whatever it is. You make sure it's covered, because you don't want anybody else seein' your tush.

Paul says it's the same way with the church, ok? Yes, there is a part of the body that is the dishonorable backside, is basically what Paul says. But he says guess what? In the same way that you show that part of your body more honor than you show your hand, because here we are...I don't worry about clothing my hand; I worry about clothing my backside...and so as a result what happens is I show more honor to certain parts of my body that would otherwise be dishonorable. I don't want other people to see...it's a part that may bring embarrassment or something like that if everybody were to see it. Paul says, 'Guess what? In the same way there are certain parts, there are certain members, there are certain roles in the church where, guess what, it's needed.' And we may look at it and we may say, 'Man, that's not an honorable position to be. I don't want to be the backside of the church. If I gotta be a body member, that's not the one I wanna be.' And Paul says, 'Guess what? That's needed. Every role is needed.' And he goes on and he says, 'Not only is it needed, but those are the parts, those are the members, that God is gonna honor one day.'

You know, you have the hand or the eye getting all puffed up about how 'Oh, I'm an eye, I do this, I do that.' I have this personal theory, and I'm really confident that I'm gonna be correct in this. This is one that I *am* pretty confident in. You know, you had the disciples and they were arguing about who was going to be the greatest. And Jesus says, 'Hey! If you wanna be great, then be the servant of everybody.' And they were arguing about being the greatest, and who was gonna sit on His right and on His left. And what Jesus says is that is only the Father's to give. I have this theory that when we get to heaven and we see who are sitting on the right and left hand side of Jesus, we are going to be dumbfounded. We won't even know who they are, probably. The disciples...they won't even be anywhere in the picture. Why? They've already had their honor. The person who's gonna be sitting on either side is gonna be somebody who is serving God faithfully in the role that God placed before them, day in, day out, week in, week out, month in, month out, year in, year out, decades on end. And it's gonna be the same way in the church, here in this church.

God honors those that, quite honestly, we don't esteem so greatly, because they get it. They say, 'You know what? Yeah, God made me to be the backside. And guess what? I'm gonna be the best one I can be.' And they embrace it, and they year-in, year out, go ahead and say, 'I am going to be all that God made me to be...for the glory of God on earth, here in this church, in the world.'

That's what Paul basically says; he says, you know, if you're puffed up you need to get a check on it, 'because you've had your honor. And when honor really counts, God's going to be the one doing it, and he's going to be honoring the least honorable of us.

So does it matter? Does it really matter if we are here, or if we are a part, if we are a active part, a active member of a body of believers? Yes, it matters! That's why Paul says, you know, if one member suffers, we all suffer. If one of us is honored, we're all honored—because we're a part of one body. It matters. It matters whether or not you are filling your position. It matters to you, because that it part of how you grown in Christ. It also matters to the body, because...let's put it this way—if all of a sudden my right leg decided, 'You know what? I'm gonna curl up and I'm not gonna work anymore,' I wouldn't be standing here. I'd be hopping around at best. I'd probably be laying down, or something else, if my bones just decided to go limp, my muscles wouldn't do anything, anything else. All of a sudden I would just fall on the ground. My body would not be as it was intended to be.

You're the same way. If you aren't using the gifts, the abilities, the experiences, whatever God gave you, however great or small you may think it is...that's what it's like—like a leg goin' limp, and now the body isn't doing exactly what it was intended to do by God.

So, application: basically, the point is this. If you're sittin' here and you say, 'I don't know what my gifts are, but ok, I'd like to get plugged in, I'd like to figure it out,' here's a simple step that you can do. You can go and...this is not the only step, but just to help you get moving in the right direction, that's why we put that table out there—to get plugged in to an area...the WBC ministry team...to help you get plugged into an area where we can walk you through the process of figuring out, man, how has God shaped you? And what's an area...where are you passionate...what interests do you have...what gifts, what abilities, what training, what experience...whatever it is, that we can help put you in a place that is just custom-fit for you.

Or another side is maybe you're sittin' here and you say, 'Yeah, it really doesn't matter whether or not I'm here.' The application for you is you need to check your attitude and realize that Christianity is personal, but it's not an individual journey.

If you're here and you're not yet a follower of Christ, and I'm convinced that there are people here that are like this, the application is simple. You can be a part of an organization all you want and it won't make a bit of difference in any manner of speaking. What matters is whether or not you become a part of the family of God, whether or not you become a member of His family, a member of the body of Christ. And by that I don't mean joining this church or joining any other church. What I mean is...have you ever come to the point where you acknowledge the fact that you are a sinner and you can't do it on your own? No organization can help. What matters is whether or not you've been adopted into God's family. And you say, 'God, I deserve whatever punishment You give me; and I'm willing to just go ahead and acknowledge the fact that I don't deserve any better. But I also know, God, that You are willing to forgive me. And so I ask You to forgive me, and I trust that Jesus paid that price for me. I trust that His death and His resurrection is good enough to make...to pay my debt so I can be a part of Your family.' If that's a decision that you wanna make, the wonderful thing is it's something that you can make right now between you and God. You don't have to go through anybody else because, see, He alone is the One who gets to adopt people into the family.

At the same time, we're gonna...in just a moment we're gonna...I'll have you stand and we'll pray, and we'll be dismissed. But following that dismissal, if you would like to pray with somebody, if you are at a point where you say, 'You know what? I wanna be a part of the family,' feel free...come down, talk to me...there'll be a couple of other people up here. If you have some part, something in your life, something that you are struggling with, just a burden that you are carrying, if there's a concern that you have, if there is something that you just wanna pray for or share with somebody, feel free to come up here. That's part of the body, part of the family, is we help pray for one another and encourage one another. If one suffers, we all suffer. We would love to pray with you.

Please stand.

Lord God,

We thank You so very much for the fact that You've made it possible for us to be a part of Your family, to be adopted in, that we are able to be members of Your body here on earth. God, I ask that You would help us to fulfill that responsibility, to not take it lightly, but also to embrace the way that You have designed us and made us to be, each as separate members of Your body. God, I ask that You would help us to fill that role, whatever it is You have for us, to the best of our ability, for Your glory.

And we pray this in Your name, amen.

Go in grace.