

God's Temple:

Health and Holiness in the Body of Christ

A Sermon Guide and Toolkit



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The United Methodist Health Ministry Fund (Health Fund) developed this sermon guide and toolkit to help faith leaders engage in a wider conversation about health and wellness that integrates with the church's call to live as the Body of Christ in the world. In this sermon guide, we explore four valences of health: emotional, physical, social, and spiritual. Our vision for this sermon guide is to deepen the understanding of health and the non-medical factors that influence it, and to help individuals and communities realize how they can help shape health in their own backyards.

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ABOUT THE HEALTH FUND

The United Methodist Health Ministry Fund is a statewide health foundation that facilitates conversation and action to improve the health and wholeness of Kansans—especially those in rural and under-served communities. Through funding programs and ideas, providing hands-on expertise, and convening influencers, the Health Fund advances innovative solutions to improve Kansans' health for generations to come. Located in Hutchinson, Kansas, the Health Fund has provided more than \$75 million in grants and program support since its inception in 1986.

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At the Health Fund, we believe health is more than health care. Our health is strongly influenced by a combination of biological, social, and environmental factors beyond our control: the conditions in our communities, the schools in our neighborhoods, the availability of healthy food and good jobs, and how close we are to hospitals and clinics.

As we continue to explore what it means to be healthy, we have created a sermon guide that will go beyond the physicality of what health “looks” like and deeper into holistic wellness that includes our emotional, physical, social, and spiritual health. We often focus on the health achieved on the outside, constantly striving to reach unattainable goals set by the mainstream and less on what it takes for us to care for our uniquely beautiful bodies.

In the pursuit of finding health, we forget the things that are intrinsically just as important, like conversations with our grandparents over a warm meal, taking time to meditate and recharge before we start our day, or clearing our schedule to simply rest. These are all important to achieving wholeness because we are more than our bodies—we are spiritual beings that long for movement, connection, and rest.

This sermon guide examines Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. The Corinthian Christians are learning how to be in community with one another and learning how to lean into the freedom Christ's followers have through divine grace. We will explore what it means to seek emotional, physical, social, and spiritual health as individuals and ultimately as a community that is called to use our bodies to glorify God.

HOW TO USE THIS SERMON GUIDE

Welcome! As “health” and “wellness” pop up as buzzwords on social media, in news reports, or even in commercials during national sporting events, it might seem like a fraught topic to address from the pulpit. Different and often competing ideas about what health means and how to achieve wellness can lead to individuals speaking past one another and vilifying every approach that does not match their own. Why would any preacher want to get involved in that kind of conversation, much less from the pulpit? The reality is that our society operates on a narrow understanding of health and wellness often based in achieving unattainable standards of beauty and/or unrealistic expectations of how bodies should function, particularly as bodies age. At the heart of these understandings of health is an entrenched individualism that flies in the face of who Christians are called to be as the Body of Christ. This guide brings together scripture, theology, and evidence-based public health practices to equip you to address health from the perspective of our responsibility to one another and the world as a community brought together by God's saving grace.

For the purposes of this sermon guide, we identify four valences of health: emotional (which includes mental), physical, social, and spiritual. By exploring health from these four perspectives, we open a wider conversation about health and wellness that integrates with the church's call to live as the Body of Christ in the world. To help guide this conversation, the sermon guide utilizes select passages from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians:

- Week 1 explores emotional health in relation to Paul's teaching that the Christian community is the temple of God, highlighting belonging as crucial to our emotional well-being as humans.
- Week 2 addresses physical health as an individual and communal endeavor as Christians are called to use our bodies to glorify God.
- Week 3 explores social health using Paul's discussion of whether the Corinthian Christians should eat meat sacrificed to idols. Paul's teaching emphasizes that social health means loving God and loving neighbor by glorifying God while also actively seeking not to be a stumbling block to our neighbors.

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- Week 4 concludes the series by exploring spiritual health as the cultivation of love as the church cooperates in using our gifts to grow and act as the Body of Christ in the world.

Each week includes a call to worship, suggested hymn selections, a children's sermon, an exegesis of the scripture, sermon notes, a call to action, and benediction.

As you prepare to use this sermon series in your congregation, we encourage you to be in contact with local mental health professionals whose services you can recommend to congregants. Depending on a person's relationship to their own health and well-being or that of their family, these topics could bring up challenging emotions and memories that are best shared in a confidential space with a person trained in mental and emotional health care. We also encourage you to be intentional in the ways that you discuss markers and stereotypes surrounding health and wellness as you preach and discuss these topics with congregants. For people who have been shamed by family members, friends, co-workers, doctors, and other medical professionals for the size, shape, or function of their body, it is important that health be discussed not with regard to certain standards of weight, beauty, or functioning but as a state of well-being or seeking well-being for all bodies just as they are.

If you find that a group of congregants wishes to go deeper in exploring the relationship between their physical and spiritual health, we encourage you to explore how you might use Candice McField's *As for Me and My Body* in your congregation. *As for Me and My Body* offers a 21-day challenge that connects practical, accessible fitness goals with spiritual application written in a non-judgmental, supportive voice. If your congregants express a desire to further explore health in relation to their faith journeys, McField's volume could be used by one or more Sunday School classes, a small group, or even the whole congregation. Note that if you do decide to use *As for Me and My Body*, we recommend using it in a group context where participants can keep one another accountable and encouraged during the 21-day challenge.

Table of contents

| | |
|---|----|
| GOD'S TEMPLE TOOLKIT | 6 |
| Resources for Talking to Your Congregation | 7 |
| SERMON GUIDE WEEK 1 | 9 |
| Call to Worship | 10 |
| Hymns | 10 |
| Children's Sermon | 11 |
| Scripture – 1 Corinthians 3:1-10, 16-19a | 12 |
| Exegesis | 12 |
| Sermon Notes | 13 |
| Benediction | 16 |
| SERMON GUIDE WEEK 2 | 17 |
| Call to Worship | 18 |
| Hymns | 18 |
| Children's Sermon | 19 |
| Scripture – 1 Corinthians 6:12-14, 19-20 | 20 |
| Exegesis | 20 |
| Sermon Notes | 21 |
| Benediction | 24 |
| SERMON GUIDE WEEK 3 | 25 |
| Call to Worship | 26 |
| Hymns | 26 |
| Children's Sermon | 27 |
| Scripture – 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1 | 28 |
| Exegesis | 28 |
| Sermon Notes | 29 |
| Benediction | 32 |
| SERMON GUIDE WEEK 4 | 33 |
| Call to Worship | 34 |
| Hymns | 34 |
| Children's Sermon | 35 |
| Scripture – 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 and 13:1-3 | 36 |
| Exegesis | 37 |
| Sermon Notes | 38 |
| Benediction | 40 |

God's Temple

Toolkit

Resources for Talking to Your Congregation



God's Temple Toolkit:

Talking to Your Congregation About Health and Wellness

NATIONWIDE RESOURCES

- American College of Sports Medicine – Trending Topic | Physical Activity Guidelines: <https://www.acsm.org/education-resources/trending-topics-resources/physical-activity-guidelines>
- Candice McField, “As for Me and My Body”: <https://asformeandmybody.com/book-synopsis/>
- Mental Health First Aid: <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/>
- National Alliance on Mental Illness: <https://nami.org/>
- Public Health Law Center at Mitchell Hamline School of Law: <https://www.publichealthlawcenter.org/>
- St. Paul's United Methodist Church & Wesley Foundation – The Walk to Jerusalem: <http://stpaulsc.org/walk-to-jerusalem>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: <https://www.samhsa.gov/>
 - Mental and Substance Use Disorders in Families: <https://www.samhsa.gov/families>
 - Mental Health Treatment Works: <https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health-treatment-works>
- The Upper Room – Walk to Emmaus: <http://emmaus.upperroom.org/>
- U.S. Department of Agriculture – Food and Nutrition Service: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/>
 - Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) Fact Sheets: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/sfsp-fact-sheets>
 - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program>

KANSAS RESOURCES

- Kansas Food Bank – Traditional Food Drives: <https://kansasfoodbank.org/how-to-help/donate-food/>
- Kansas Food Resource – Food Resources in Kansas: <https://kansasfoodsource.org/>
- K-State Research and Extension – Walk Kansas: <https://www.walkkansas.org/>
- KS Community Health Worker Coalition – Locate CHWs in Kansas: <https://kschw.org/map-workers/>
- Travel Kansas – Farmers Markets: <https://www.travelks.com/things-to-do/farm-experiences/farmers-markets/>

RESOURCES IN THIS SERMON GUIDE

Resources are listed in the order they appear.

WEEK 1

- Brené Brown, Atlas of the Heart: Mapping Meaningful Connection and the Language of Human Experience: <https://bookshop.org/books/atlas-of-the-heart-mapping-meaningful-connection-and-the-language-of-human-experience/9780399592553>
- The Gottman Institute – Printable Feeling Wheel: <https://www.gottman.com/blog/printable-feeling-wheel/>
- National Alliance on Mental Illness: <https://nami.org/>

WEEK 2

- The Annie E. Casey Foundation, “Food Deserts in the United States”: <https://www.aecf.org/blog/exploring-americas-food-deserts>
- NY Health Foundation, “Community Health Workers and Congregations Team Up to Fight Diabetes”: <https://nyhealthfoundation.org/grantee-story/community-health-workers-and-congregations-team-up-to-fight-diabetes/>
- Kansas Food Bank – Traditional Food Drives: <https://kansasfoodbank.org/how-to-help/donate-food/>

WEEK 3

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services – Healthy People 2030, Social and Community Context: <https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/browse-objectives/social-and-community-context>
- United States Census Bureau, “Income and Poverty in the United States: 2020”: <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2021/demo/p60-273.pdf>
- Talk Poverty – Kansas: <https://talkpoverty.org/state-year-report/kansas-2020-report/>
- VOXEU CEPR, “Perceptions of racial gaps, their causes, and ways to reduce them”: <https://voxeu.org/article/perceptions-racial-gaps-their-causes-and-ways-reduce-them>
- Kansas Department of Health and Environment – WIC Approved Foods: <https://www.kdhe.ks.gov/1198/WIC-Approved-Foods>
- United States Department of Agriculture – Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) Fact Sheets: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/sfsp-fact-sheets>
- Gardenologist – Cooperative Extension Directory: <https://gardenologist.org/cooperative-extension-directory-for-all-50-states-dc-and-puerto-rico/>
- CSG Justice Center, “Developing and Implementing Your Co-Responder Program”: <https://csgjusticecenter.org/publications/developing-and-implementing-your-co-responder-program/>

WEEK 4

- National Library of Medicine, National Center for Biotechnology Information, “Spiritual Scale 2011: Defining and Measuring 4th Dimension of Health”: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3263147/>
- Wesley Center Online, “The Sermons of John Wesley – Sermon 92: On Zeal”: <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-92-on-zeal/>
- Sunflower Foundation – Sunflower Trails Profile: Trail in a Box: http://www.sunflowerfoundation.org/what_we_do/healthy_living/sunflower_trails_profile_trail_in_a_box

Sermon Guide

Week 1





Call to Worship

Creator God, who made us to be living, feeling, communal people...

Guide us on the path to health and life everlasting.

Saving God, who watches us struggle to care for the bodies you created, both our own and our neighbors'...

Save us to live in health and life everlasting.

Sustaining God, who made us to need one another and mourns when we choose division instead of following in the way of Christ...

Help us take care of each other on our journey toward health and life everlasting.

Loving God, who empowers us to love one another, diverse yet unified in God's love...

Lead us into health and life everlasting as the Body of Christ.

Amen.



Hymn Selections:

- **“Ask Ye What Great Thing I Know”**
United Methodist Hymnal #163
- **“Blest Be the Dear Uniting Love”**
United Methodist Hymnal #566*
- **“Christ for the World We Sing”**
United Methodist Hymnal #568

*If the tune is unfamiliar for your community, use the tune LAND OF REST (UMH 566) or AZMON (UMH 57).



Children's Sermon

SUPPLIES: A bowl with healthy snacks for the kids (i.e., small oranges, small apples, individual packs of nuts).

After the children gather, say:

Good morning! Today we are starting a series on health. What do you think “health” means? (*Wait for answers.*) Those are excellent answers. Health essentially means a person’s physical or mental condition. Well, for the next few weeks, we are going to talk about different aspects of health: emotional health, physical health, social health, and spiritual health. And to do this, we are going to look at a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote almost 2,000 years ago to a church in a city called Corinth.

Now, this church was having a lot of problems. They were all brand new at being Christians, and they were trying to figure out what following Jesus meant for how they were supposed to live. One thing they were struggling with was accepting that they needed to love everybody equally because everybody was equally saved and loved by God, no matter who first told them about Jesus or baptized them. To help us get a better idea of what was happening, let’s act this out together. (*Count the children off into two groups and have each group stand on a different side of you with a wide space in the middle.*) Now, I’m going to place a bowl of snacks on the ground (*place the bowl in the space between the two groups*). Group #1, you are the group that says they belong to Paul, and Group #2, you are the group that says they belong to Apollos. Now, Group #1, how many of you want a snack? (*Wait for them to raise hands.*) Group #2, how many of you want a snack? (*Wait for them to raise hands.*) Well, that’s a problem, because the snacks are for the people who belong to Jesus. Now, Paul and Apollos told both groups about Jesus. They were all saved because of Jesus. But when they separated into groups, they kept themselves from receiving one of the good things that Jesus gave all of them—a place to belong *together*. So, Group #1, do you think it would be better to belong to Paul and have no snacks, or belong to Jesus and share snacks with Group #2? (*Wait for answers.*) And Group #2, do you think it would be better to belong to Apollos and have no snacks, or belong to Jesus and share snacks with Group #1? (*Wait for answer.*) Yes! It is better to share what we have together than to divide ourselves and have nothing. Now, let’s come back together and sit around the snack bowl. (*Wait for them to sit down.*)

When we divide ourselves, we lose something that is very important for our emotional health—*belonging*. Belonging is the feeling of knowing that you are accepted and loved just as you are. As we move through this series about health, we are going to end each week with an exercise. I want you to turn and face your neighbor and look into their eyes. (*Wait for everyone to pair off.*) As you look into their eyes, say, “You belong here.” (*Wait for them to do this. Repeat the instructions if they don’t respond well the first time.*) Now, I want you to look out into the congregation, look at all of the people there, and say, “You belong here.”

Very good. Also, after we pray, you can come get a snack out of the bowl to take with you. Let’s pray:

Loving God, thank you for bringing us together as a community. Help us know that we belong to you and we belong to one another through your love.

Amen.



Scripture • 1 Corinthians 3:1-10, 16-19a

And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people but rather as fleshly, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, for you are still fleshly. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not fleshly and behaving according to human inclinations? For when one says, “I belong to Paul,” and another, “I belong to Apollos,” are you not all too human?

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and each will receive wages according to their own labor. For we are God’s coworkers, working together; you are God’s field, God’s building. According to the grace of God given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Let each builder choose with care how to build on it.

Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple. Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.



Exegesis

Of all the Pauline epistles, 1 Corinthians demonstrates Paul at his most practical and pastoral. Far from a systematic theological treatise, Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians is a direct response to problems occurring on the ground among the Christians in Corinth as he attempts to apply faith in the crucified and risen Christ to the real issues dividing the Corinthian Christians against one another. This is theology in the trenches, theology performed in the liminal space between our sinful inclinations and our sanctification through salvation in Christ. As Paul demonstrates in this letter, while we are all responsible for our individual contributions either to divisiveness or Christian unity, our journey as Christians and the consequences of our actions always occur in community with other Christians.

In the opening verse of chapter 3, Paul begins recalling how the Corinthians were “infants” or “children” in Christ when he first came to them, indicating that the Corinthians were mere beginners in Christian knowledge. Just as a child may make progress toward maturity, so can the Corinthians. Yet in their jealousy and quarreling with one another, the Corinthian Christians demonstrate to Paul that they are still children who can only stomach spiritual milk, which, presumably, Paul offers them in this letter. The content of 1 Corinthians is not advanced learning or spiritual meat—it contains the basics of what it means to live as Christians and be in Christian community with one another. Paul’s signal that the Corinthians are still beginners in Christian faith and understanding provides necessary context for the following verses in which he addresses a particular area of their divisiveness. When the Corinthians split into factions and claim greater status or authority over one another according to which apostle baptized them, they are acting as spiritual children who need correction.

In verses 5-10, Paul deploys two metaphors for the Christian community: gardening and building. Through these metaphors, Paul cuts through the noise of bickering factions to point them to what truly matters—the God who graciously saves. Ultimately the role of the master gardeners or master builders is nothing compared to the role of God who saved the Corinthians and continues to help them grow through divine grace. The Corinthian Christians—and subsequently, all members of the Body of Christ—are God’s field and God’s building. God alone brings growth through grace.

In verses 16-19a, Paul takes the building metaphor further. No longer is the Christian community simply God’s building—they, and we, are God’s *dwelling*. No longer does Paul envision God occupying the stationary building of the Temple in Jerusalem. Now, God makes God’s home in God’s people. Notably, the Greek *naos* translated as “temple” in verse 16 is the same word used to indicate the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem. One must not lose sight of the physical, embodied reality of Paul’s teaching here. God makes God’s home in God’s people—body, mind, and soul. While this teaching has implications for individual Christians, Paul’s first concern is that the Corinthians recognize that God dwells in them as a collective community. Paul laid a foundation for the Corinthians by preaching the crucified and risen Christ. Built on Christ as our cornerstone, the people that make up the church then and now are the place where God’s Spirit lives, forming and re-forming us into the image of Christ. And as the Body of Christ in the world, the community of Christians is called to reject the wisdom of the world for the foolishness of God. In the context of 1 Corinthians 3, choosing the foolishness of God means rejecting worldly power and empowering one another after the example of Christ by humbly submitting to each other’s good and recognizing vulnerability as the source of our communal power in God.



Sermon Notes

INTRODUCTION

What does it mean to be healthy? The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines healthy as: 1. Enjoying good health; 2. beneficial to one’s physical, mental, or emotional state; and 3. showing physical, emotional, or mental well-being (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/healthy>). OK, easy enough. To be healthy, we have to do things that are beneficial to our physical, emotional, or mental health or well-being. We all know how to do that, right? Well, if you’ve watched TV, been on social media, or gone down the aisles of the grocery store lately, you’ve probably realized that our society cannot seem to agree on how to *be healthy*. Your cereal box claims to be heart healthy while your friend on the newest fad diet says all carbs are bad no matter what. The sports drink commercial says that their product hydrates better than water, but no one can seem to agree on how much water we actually need each day. And how exactly are we supposed to find the time to work, exercise, meditate, journal, eat three nutritious meals, connect with friends, have alone time, have meaningful time with our families, and get eight hours of sleep *every single day*? Even if we feel like we know what we are *supposed* to do to be healthy, figuring out how to make that happen day in and day out can feel overwhelming and stressful. And oh, have you heard, stress is bad for your health?

This sermon series is not here to guilt or pressure you into doing more to ensure you and your family are healthy. Instead, we are going to spend the next four weeks creating space to explore what God has to say about health in the context of Christian community. Many of the messages we receive about health in our society include mandates and restrictions that we as individuals are supposed to follow in order to be healthy. Rarely do we stop and ask, what does God say about health and what role do we play as God’s people in supporting each other’s health? Every week, I repeat this message: whatever your body is, however your body shows up in this space, you are made in the image of God and your body and your whole person is welcome here. This sermon series is not going to tell you to change your body, your mind, or your emotions to fit a sense of what or who a person *should* be. Instead, we are going to explore together what kind of health God desires for us and calls us to enact in our communities just as we are in this moment. Each week, we will explore a different aspect of health. This week, we begin by exploring emotional health.

SERMON NOTES

1. We will be engaging Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians throughout this sermon series. We can tell from this first reading in chapter 3 that the Corinthian church is not in the healthiest place. Paul's primary purpose in this letter is to offer a direct response to problems occurring on the ground among the Christians in Corinth. As he indicates in 1 Corinthians 3:1-2, these are baby Christians. While they have accepted the good news of salvation that comes through the crucified and risen Christ, they are still very new at incorporating their faith into their actual lives. Paul, then, is tasked with doing theology in the trenches, helping the Christian community in Corinth figure out how to recognize and navigate their sinful inclinations and their ongoing sanctification into the image of Christ.

2. One of the problems facing the Corinthian Christians is that they had divided in factions based on who had baptized them. By claiming that some belonged to Paul and some belonged to Apollos, they vied for importance and authority over one another, which Paul takes to be a demonstration of just how "young" they are in the faith. Notice that Paul does not call out people for their individual actions that contribute to this divisiveness. For Paul, while each of these Corinthian Christians were responsible for their individual contributions to their community's ongoing problems, our journey as Christians and the consequences of our actions always occur in community with other Christians. So, Paul writes not to admonish individuals but to give these new Christians a guidebook on how to be a healthy community, on how to be the Body of Christ together.

3. When we talk about emotional health, it is important to recognize that being healthy emotionally is something that impacts all of us individually and as a community. The temptation in our society is to think that attending to emotional health is only for people with a diagnosed mental health condition, or who are grieving the loss of a loved one, or maybe for couples who are struggling with conflict. The average person, so the story goes, has no reason to address their emotional health. The problem with this narrative is threefold. First, it stigmatizes people who have a mental illness, who are grieving, or who are experiencing issues in their close relationships. Emotional health, then, is only something to address when a person experiences great crisis within their emotional world. Second, this narrative perpetuates the lie that only some people have to address their emotional health but that most people do not. In truth, we all have emotions just like we all have bodies. Therefore, we all have emotional health to tend just like we all have physical health to tend. Third, this narrative treats our emotional health as an individual issue to be addressed only by individuals. If only some people have struggles with their emotional health, then the community bears little to no responsibility to tend to the emotional health of one another.

4. Yet, according to Paul, as Christians we are called to tend to our communal life together because we are a community brought together by God. Paul uses the metaphors of gardening and building to teach the Corinthians that whether Paul planted and Apollos watered or whether Paul laid the foundation and another comes to build on top of that foundation, only God is responsible for the life and growth of Christian community—then *and* now. For Paul, the recognition of God's gracious gift of salvation and loving work of drawing us into community is critical to addressing the divisions that threatened to separate and do harm to the Corinthian Christians. Their divisions that focused on human notions of authority and influence missed the point of being in community with one another. They all belonged in community together not because of who baptized them but because of the saving grace they all received from God in baptism.

5. Today, the divisions that thrive in our churches, our neighborhoods, our schools, and our political landscape can keep us from recognizing the crucial role that belonging plays in our emotional health, as individuals and as a community. We are social people. We need connection with one another in order to survive, much less thrive. In her research on belonging, shame, connection, and vulnerability, Brené Brown offers two insights that are critical to understanding belonging in the Body of Christ. In her 2021 book *Atlas of the Heart*, Brown writes, first, that "we have to belong to ourselves as much as we need to belong to others. Any belonging that asks us to betray ourselves is not true belonging" (*Atlas of the Heart*, 155). The first aspect of belonging is actually tending to and naming our own emotions, recognizing how we are feeling, identifying where we may be struggling, and accepting our emotions as part of who we are. Belonging

to ourselves means recognizing and embracing our own emotional lives as part of who we are. Brené Brown then writes that “belonging is a practice that requires us to be vulnerable, get uncomfortable, and learn how to be present with people without sacrificing who we are” (*Atlas of the Heart*, 159). Notice that this definition of belonging requires each of us as individuals to be attentive to our emotions and emotional health and yet we cannot find belonging without each other. Attending to our emotional health makes us more capable of creating spaces for belonging in all areas of our lives—home, work, church, neighborhood, you name it! And lest we think that belonging is a luxury, Brené Brown’s research reveals that “in the absence of [love and belonging,] there is always suffering” (*Atlas of the Heart*, 159). Belonging is not superfluous. It is absolutely necessary for surviving and thriving as human beings.

6. Emotional well-being depends on belonging and belonging happens both in ourselves and in community. In verses 16-19a, Paul offers us another area of belonging—belonging to God. Riffing on his metaphor of the Corinthian church as God’s building, Paul extends the metaphor to say that *you*—and in this instance, we need to hear this “you” as being directed to the Corinthians but also to all of us—are God’s temple. No longer is the Christian community simply God’s building—they, and we, are God’s *dwelling*. God makes God’s home in God’s people. The Greek *naos* translated as “temple” in verse 16 is the same word used to indicate the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem. Paul is saying that God makes God’s home in God’s people—body, mind, and soul. While this teaching has implications for individual Christians, Paul’s first concern is that the Corinthians recognize that God dwells in them—and us—as a collective community. Therefore, we have a responsibility to the health of one another—emotional, physical, spiritual, and communal. To be clear, this does not mean that we have a responsibility to tell someone else that they are not healthy and what we think they should do to fix that. Our responsibility to one another is to cultivate the belonging, caring, and boundaries with one another that promote emotional health for everyone in the community.

7. As Paul indicates in verses 18-19, this form of caring for one another as the dwelling place of God goes directly against the wisdom of this world. In a world where all resources—physical, emotional, and social—are treated as scarce, we as the temple of God are called to recognize the abundance in our life together. Tending our emotional health individually and communally keeps us open to one another’s needs *and* one another’s gifts. The foolishness of God rejects worldly power in favor of empowering one another by humbly looking after each other’s well-being and recognizing that our vulnerability is the source of our power in God. Where the world says emotional struggles are a source of weakness, we recognize that God dwells with us even in our struggles. Where the world denies hard emotions, we choose to be present with each other through the difficult emotions. Where the world stigmatizes people who need therapy or medication for their emotional health, we encourage each other to talk to a mental health professional or a doctor when that’s necessary. When the world says mental health is not worth funding, we join together to advocate for expanded mental health services in our communities. When the world says to only look out for yourself, we choose the foolishness of supporting one another in community because we are God’s dwelling place, brought together by grace to love and serve God and neighbor both inside and outside the walls of the church.



Benediction

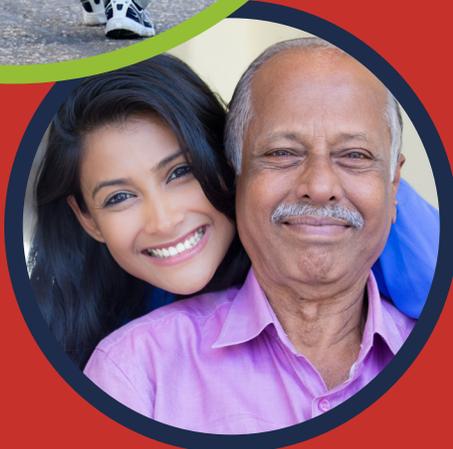
As you go forth today, go in the knowledge that you belong—to yourself, to each other, and to God—and may you, as God's temple in the world, be blessed to be a blessing to those in desperate need of a place to be and belong just as they are.

Amen.

For a printable bulletin insert - [click here](#)

Sermon Guide

Week 2





Call to Worship

Creator God, who made us to be living, feeling, communal people...

Guide us on the path to health and life everlasting.

Saving God, who watches us struggle to care for the bodies you created, both our own and our neighbors'...

Save us to live in health and life everlasting.

Sustaining God, who made us to need one another and mourns when we choose division instead of following in the way of Christ...

Help us take care of each other on our journey toward health and life everlasting.

Loving God, who empowers us to love one another, diverse yet unified in God's love...

Lead us into health and life everlasting as the Body of Christ.

Amen.



Hymn Selections:

- **“How Can We Name a Love”**
United Methodist Hymnal #111
- **“Take My Life, and Let It Be”**
United Methodist Hymnal #399
- **“And Are We Yet Alive”**
United Methodist Hymnal #553



Children's Sermon

After the children gather, say:

Good morning! Who remembers what our sermon series right now is about? (*Wait for answers.*) That's right—health! Last week, we talked about how the church in Corinth was having a hard time and needed to be reminded that *all of them* belonged through Christ, and that belonging is important for our emotional health. Well, this week, we are going to talk about physical health.

I have a question. If I laid out a big table full of your favorite foods, what would they be? (*Wait for answers.*) So, let's imagine a table full of those foods, plus some extra chocolate and macaroni and cheese and ice cream. Now, what if I told you that you could eat anything on that table and you could eat as much as you want? How excited would you be? (*Wait for answers.*)

This is kind of the situation that the church of Corinth was facing, but it wasn't just a table full of their favorite foods. Because they believed in Jesus and were free from being afraid of what might happen to them if they did or didn't follow certain rules, they suddenly felt like they could do anything without any consequences. But let's say you ate every single food you could possibly fit in your stomach from that table we imagined—how would you feel? (*Wait for answers.*) I think most of us would feel pretty sick. You wouldn't be in trouble for breaking any rules, but that doesn't mean your body wouldn't feel bad after eating way too much food, no matter how yummy that food is.

When Paul writes to the church in Corinth, he reminds them they may be able to do anything they want, but that doesn't mean that anything they want to do is good for them. And then he tells them something interesting. He says, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?" Paul is saying, "Hey! God lives in you. God lives in your heart but also in your body because your body is part of who you are." Whoa! If God lives in us, then it's really important that we pay attention to keeping our bodies healthy. Now, that doesn't mean that you have to look a certain way, wear certain kinds of clothes, or do your hair one way or the other. It means that we need to do things that help our bodies feel their best. Maybe it's drinking more water or snacking on some grapes or playing outside an extra 30 minutes. It also means that we need to make sure other people have what they need for their bodies to feel their best, whether that's having enough food to eat or being able to go to the doctor. If God lives in each of us, then helping other people's bodies feel their best is honoring that they, too, are children of God.

So, for our exercise today, I want you to turn to a neighbor (*wait for them to find a neighbor*), give them a high five and say, "God lives in you!" (*Wait for them to finish.*) Now, turn to the congregation, give them an air high five and say, "God lives in you!"

Very good. Let's pray:

Loving God, thank you for giving us bodies and for living in us. Help us take care of our bodies and our neighbors' bodies well.

Amen.



Scripture • 1 Corinthians 6:12-14, 19-20

“All things are permitted for me,” but not all things are beneficial. “All things are permitted for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything. “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food,” and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for sexual immorality but for the Lord and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power.

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.



Exegesis

For a book of the Bible with no narrative content, 1 Corinthians is astonishingly full of bodies. While famous for the Body of Christ imagery in chapter 12, human embodiment, and what we are supposed to do with our bodies, features significantly throughout the entire epistle. This week’s pericope follows Paul’s teaching on why members of the Christian community should not sue one another. After exhorting them to remember that they have been washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of Jesus and in the Holy Spirit, Paul turns to another—though related—issue: living in human bodies.

While it is readily apparent that all humans live in a body, Paul was concerned with how the Corinthians were not valuing their own bodies and/or were not valuing *all* bodies equally. Verse 12 opens with one of the slogans popular among the Corinthians. The saying “all things are permitted for me” in all likelihood did not originate with or remain confined to the Corinthian Christians. Scholars think this slogan was probably popular among a wide swath of the citizens of Corinth and likely had its historic origins among the Stoics. Yet rather than indicating a Stoic sense of freedom that comes from withdrawing from the world, the Corinthian Christians seem to use the phrase to justify their (questionable) actions in light of their salvific knowledge of Christ. Paul offers two important correctives. First, Paul warns that not all things are beneficial. As many of us may have heard from our parents, “just because you can doesn’t mean you should.” Second, Paul admonishes that one should not be dominated by anything, that is, no thing or action should have power over a person who has found freedom in Christ. In these two correctives, Paul offers two discernment tools for determining whether a person is using their freedom according to the way of Christ. Living in Christian freedom includes attending to whether an action or choice is beneficial and to whether an action or choice is exercising mastery over the person instead of the person over the action.

That Paul’s concern centers around the Corinthian Christians’ use of their bodies becomes evident in verses 13-14 in his discussion of food and the body itself. Referencing another saying that held sway among the Corinthians, Paul takes up the issue of food. The slogan Paul quotes emphasizes food as something free to be used because it is *merely* for the stomach and matters of the stomach are matters of this world that do not impact the life of the soul. Paul quickly counters such thinking by re-contextualizing both food and the stomach in relation to God. Both, Paul says, fall under the authority of God. Paul then expands this teaching by improvising on the slogan, writing “the body is meant...for the Lord and the Lord for the body.” Lest Paul’s readers think that salvation in Christ means freedom to do whatever they like in the body, Paul makes it clear that Christian salvation, and therefore freedom, occurs in the context of the body, as evidenced

by the resurrection of Christ and our resurrection hope as followers of Christ.

When Paul returns to the temple metaphor he used in 1 Corinthians 3:16, he now emphasizes that individual bodies are the temple of God. This does not detract from the communal valence of the metaphor in 1 Corinthians 3, but rather strengthens it by emphasizing that God dwells in the *whole* of the Christian community, including the individual bodies in it. The body, then, is God's residence on Earth. Thus, how we treat our individual bodies, how we treat other bodies, and how we use our bodies in service to God are directly tied to our physical, emotional, communal, and spiritual health.



Sermon Notes

INTRODUCTION

Do you not know that you are God's temple? Last week, we explored this question in relation to emotional health as we grappled with Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. Today, as we jump to 1 Corinthians 6, we actually see this temple metaphor return, this time in relation to our bodies. You may be wondering why we started this sermon series with emotional health and saved physical health for the second week. Well, it's actually all Paul's fault. Following the wisdom of Paul's letter, we begin with emotional health because loving and belonging to ourselves, one another, and God is the necessary context out of which we can talk about physical health. We live in a culture where physical health is so often defined by how our bodies function and what our bodies look like. We receive messages that our health and happiness is dependent on the size of our bodies, being able to wear certain kinds of clothes, or being able to achieve certain fitness goals. So, we end up judging the health of our bodies by our culture's standards of beauty and worth, such that we confuse those standards with God's. Today, we will explore Paul's teaching about bodies in 1 Corinthians as a way to recalibrate and recognize God's standards for physical health and how we can support one another in our physical health journeys as a community of belonging in God.

SERMON NOTES

1. In 1 Corinthians 6, we encounter another of the problems in the Corinthian Christian community. Whereas the problem addressed in chapter 3 centered around divisions about authority and belonging, the problem raised in today's passage is the way the Corinthian Christians were living with regard to their bodies. Since they had saving knowledge of Christ and were promised eternal life after death in Christ, the Corinthian Christians were apparently living as though how they acted in their bodies had no bearing on or was not impacted by the saving work of divine grace on their souls. Paul addresses this problem by quoting two slogans that were likely well known in the city of Corinth. This appears at the opening of verse 12: "all things are permitted for me." This slogan likely originated among the Stoics, a school of Ancient Greek philosophy. Yet rather than indicating a Stoic sense of freedom that comes from withdrawing from the world, the Corinthian Christians seem to use the phrase to justify how they lived in their bodies now because, they thought, the body does not matter in light of their salvific knowledge in Christ and the promise of life after death.

2. In verse 12, Paul offers two important correctives to this misguided understanding of the freedom Christ followers have through divine grace. First, Paul counters that even if all things are permissible, not all things are beneficial. You can almost hear Paul as a parent offering a gentle but firm lecture to the Corinthians, "Just because you *can* doesn't mean you *should*." Second, Paul warns a person should not be dominated or controlled by anything. Salvation through divine grace does not immediately make a person immune to the draw of habits and behaviors that might take over and do harm, whether to the individual person or to the community. In these two correctives, Paul offers two discernment tools that can help us decide how to live into our freedom in Christ according to the way of Christ. Living in Christian freedom includes

attending to whether an action or choice is beneficial and to whether an action or choice is exercising mastery over the person instead of the person over the action.

3. Paul’s concern about how the Corinthian Christians were living in their bodies becomes evident in verses 13-14 in his discussion of food and the body itself. Referencing another saying that held sway among the Corinthians, Paul takes up the issue of food. The slogan “food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food” emphasizes food as something free to be used because it is *merely* for the stomach and matters of the stomach are matters of this world that do not impact the life of the soul. Paul quickly counters such thinking by re-contextualizing both food and the stomach in relation to God. Both, Paul says, fall under the authority of God. Paul then expands this teaching by improvising on the slogan, writing “the body is meant...for the Lord and the Lord for the body.” Salvation in Christ means freedom but does not mean Christians can do whatever they like in the body. The freedom Christians receive in our salvation occurs within the body, as evidenced by the resurrection of Christ and our resurrection hope as followers of Christ.

4. When we think about physical health in the context of Paul’s teachings, it is important to recognize the ways our society pressures us to look a certain way, exercise a certain way, or eat a certain way to signal that we are physically healthy. Eating organic produce can have many benefits for our bodies and for the environment, but that does not make non-organic produce somehow less healthy for people who cannot buy organic. For the 39.5 million people in the United States living in a food desert, organic or non-organic produce is not a matter of choice because they lack consistent access to any kind of fresh produce (<https://www.aecf.org/blog/exploring-americas-food-deserts>). In the state of Kansas, 15% of people lack reliable access to nutritious food and 30% of all counties are designated as food deserts. If Paul were here, he would be less concerned to tell you to buy organic and more concerned to make sure that everyone in our community has access to food that nourishes and sustains their physical health. Rather than focusing on inaccessible and unimportant standards of beauty, Paul would ask us to consider whether valorizing a model’s body helps us live in our own bodies well. Underneath the discernment tools that Paul offers in 6:12-14 are questions that we can apply to our own physical health—do my choices and actions today benefit how I feel in my body and do my choices and actions today demonstrate that I am dominated by something outside of God? Nowhere in this passage does Paul say that living well in the body means looking a certain way. God did not make all bodies to look or function the same. In actuality, Paul would ask us to consider whether we hold up a certain number on the scale, dress size, or celebrity as an idol that takes the place of God in our lives, because if so, that would be an example of being dominated by something outside of God.

5. Today’s passage ends with a recapitulation, or return, of the temple metaphor we encountered in chapter 3. This time, Paul emphasizes that individual bodies are the temple of God. Note, this does not detract from or diminish the communal aspect of the temple metaphor in 1 Corinthians 3. Rather, Paul strengthens the idea of God dwelling in us as a community by emphasizing that God dwells in the individual bodies that make up our community. The body—my body, your body, our body—is God’s residence on Earth. Thus, how we treat our individual bodies, how we treat other bodies, and how we use our bodies in service to God are directly tied to our physical, emotional, social, and spiritual health. Since our bodies are God’s dwelling place on Earth, we must attend not just to our own individual health, but also to the communal factors that impact health outcomes for many if not all of us. In the world of public health, these factors are called social determinants of health. The five social determinants of health are: 1. Economic stability; 2. Education access and quality; 3. Health care access and quality; 4. Neighborhood and built environment; and 5. Social and community context. While some of these five factors may not seem to be directly related to physical health, each of these factors impact the physical well-being of every single one of us, either to our benefit or to our detriment. For example, people who live in a food desert and don’t have easy access to healthy foods are less likely to have good nutrition. A lack of good nutrition raises their risk of health conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and obesity and can even lower life expectancy compared to people who do have access to healthy foods. When we work toward improving even one of these social determinants for everyone in our neighborhoods and community, we can improve overall health for many if not all of our neighbors.

6. Let’s take a deeper dive into access to health care. In a society that treats physical health as an individual endeavor, it can be quite tempting to judge a person encountering struggles with physical health as being lazy or irresponsible. Recognizing that God resides in our embodied humanity leads to a recognition that a person’s worth and contribution to

the community is not determined by how their body does or does not function. God does not devalue bodies when a limb or eyes or ears or brain do not function “as expected.” God values all of our bodies because we are God’s people. We belong to God and to one another through God. Our value comes from belonging, not from our productivity. With that in mind, we have a communal responsibility to one another to work toward affordable health care options that are accessible to everyone in our neighborhood and community.

7. One significant but underrecognized way we can support greater, more equitable access to health care in rural and urban communities is by investing in Community Health Workers (CHWs). CHWs—also known as health navigators, promoters/promotoras, advocates, and educators—perform many functions in a community. They can offer assistance to residents, culturally or linguistically appropriate education services, advocacy, coordination of care, and insurance enrollment. A recent study commissioned by the United Methodist Health Ministry Fund found that integrating CHWs into health care teams results in more appropriate access to health care, improves health outcomes, addresses equity issues in our current health care system, and delivers a strong return on investment at the organization and systems levels.

As a lay member of a community—that is, someone who does not have credentialing as a nurse, physician assistant, or physician—a CHW plays an important role as a trusted member of the community who can advocate and bridge the gap between the health care system and community residents in need of treatment and care. Some of the challenges facing the integration of more CHWs in our communities are: 1. A lack of recognition of the role CHWs play and therefore fewer employment opportunities; and 2. A need for more sustainable funding options for CHW positions as CHWs are often funded by third-party grants or contracts. One of the ways that churches can participate in making CHWs more sustainable and prevalent in our communities is using our voices and influence to advocate for funding at the state and federal level since grant funding is not a sustainable long-term solution on its own. Further, we can lift up and support the current work of CHWs in our communities. In one community in Kansas, an oncology patient with stage 4 prostate cancer re-enrolled in the local CHW program. Upon making a home visit, the CHW discovered that the man and his daughter were living in an old trailer home that did not have running water because their pipes had burst over the winter. For several months, they had depended on a garden hose to provide running water in their home. Since the man and his daughter are both undocumented, their options for improving their living space were very limited. The CHW listened and witnessed the difficulties the family was experiencing, prayed with the man, and then asked permission to share his story on social media to bring the community together to help him and his daughter. As a result, several families in the community came together to donate their time, skills, materials, and money to help this man and his family. After very little time, the man’s house had hot and cold running water, and they had money to buy hygiene supplies and foods the man could eat as a cancer patient. The transformation for the man was not just physical but emotional—where he had been depressed and despairing, he now came to his medical appointments clean shaven and happy. All because a Community Health Worker was able to stop, be present, and wield their connections in the community to benefit this man and his family as he navigates quite serious medical concerns.

If you or someone you know is struggling to navigate the health care system, inquire about a Community Health Worker in your area who could help. Consider how to create relationships with CHWs already in your area. Like in New York, where congregations have teamed up with CHWs to address diabetes risk through detection and prevention programs taught at churches (<https://nyhealthfoundation.org/grantee-story/community-health-workers-and-congregations-team-up-to-fight-diabetes/>). The church can be a powerful ally and support to the work of CHWs, particularly as they seek to address the social determinants of health that are negatively impacting their clients’ physical health and recovery.

8. Whether we are tending to our own physical health or working for our neighbors to have greater access to services that will improve their physical health, we glorify God in our bodies when we focus on physical health as an exercise in loving God and neighbor. Part of belonging to ourselves, to one another, and to God is treating our bodies well. When we let go of our society’s standards of beauty and health, we recognize how those standards can actually dominate us and lead to shame and enmity with our bodies instead of a sense of belonging in our bodies. When we follow Paul’s wisdom, we recognize that tending our physical health in the ways God designed and desires leads to peace and belonging, beginning in our own bodies and then extending to all the bodies that we encounter at church, at work, and in our neighborhoods.



Benediction

As we prepare to go today, I invite you to place one hand over your heart and one hand on your stomach and repeat after me: This body is the temple of God. May God be glorified in my body.

Amen.

For a printable bulletin insert - [click here](#)

Sermon Guide

Week 3





Call to Worship

Creator God, who made us to be living, feeling, communal people...

Guide us on the path to health and life everlasting.

Saving God, who watches us struggle to care for the bodies you created, both our own and our neighbors'...

Save us to live in health and life everlasting.

Sustaining God, who made us to need one another and mourns when we choose division instead of following in the way of Christ...

Help us take care of each other on our journey toward health and life everlasting.

Loving God, who empowers us to love one another, diverse yet unified in God's love...

Lead us into health and life everlasting as the Body of Christ.

Amen.



Hymn Selections:

- **“Blest Be the Tie That Binds”**
United Methodist Hymnal #557
- **“Help Us Accept Each Other”**
United Methodist Hymnal #560
- **“One Bread, One Body”**
United Methodist Hymnal #620



Children's Sermon

SUPPLIES: A medium or large bucket or basket, a ball, enough healthy snacks for each kid (i.e., small oranges, small apples, individual packs of nuts, etc.) wrapped in a gift bag.

After the children gather, say:

Good morning! For the last several weeks, we have been talking about health. The first week, we talked about emotional health and the importance of belonging. The second week, we talked about physical health and helping our bodies feel their best because we are God's temple, the place where God lives. This week, we are going to talk about social health. Social health is the way that we relate to one another in our families, our church, our school, and out in our community.

In our scripture today, Paul is talking to the Christians in Corinth again. They are having a hard time figuring out what to do because some of them are worried about eating a certain kind of meat and some of them don't think it is a problem. The ones who don't have a problem eating that kind of meat don't seem to be very kind and understanding about why the others are worried. And in reality, God isn't upset with them for eating that meat—God is fine with them eating that meat. So, Paul writes again to the church in Corinth, but instead of telling the ones who are worried that they are wrong and the others that they are right, he tells all of them that their first priority is to take care of each other. Being a Christian is not about being right or wrong, it's about taking care of each other.

Let's play a game. I need one volunteer to come play the game and if you win, you get a prize! (*Pick a volunteer and have them stand off to one side on the floor. Hand the volunteer the ball.*) Now, _____, hold that ball while I place this bucket/basket over here. (*Place the bucket/basket on the other side away from the volunteer, at least 6 feet away, if not more.*) OK, _____, I want you to get that ball into the bucket/basket. Here are the rules. You can't throw it, roll it, or bounce it, and you can't move from the spot you're at. OK, go! (*Wait to see what the child does—probably nothing.*) (*Turning to the children.*) What's the problem? Why can't _____ get the ball in the bucket/basket? (*Wait for answers.*) Well, the rules don't say that nobody can help _____. Do you think you all could help them? (*Guide the children to stand in a line between the volunteer and the bucket/basket. Have them hand the ball down the line to get it to the bucket/basket.*) You did it! And now you can get the prize!! (*Take the bag to the original volunteer.*) What's in there? That's right—snacks for everybody! (*Pass out the snacks and have the kids sit back down.*)

You all did such a great job of helping _____ and you all benefited from working together! This is how God wants us to approach social health—by recognizing that we need each other. So, for today's exercise, I want you to face a partner (*wait for them to face a partner*), shake their hand and say, "I need you, and you need me." Now, turn to face the congregation and say it again, "I need you, and you need me."

Let's pray:

Loving God, help us remember that no matter what problem we are facing, we need you and we need each other. Give us the kindness and grace to take care of each other.

Amen.



Scripture • 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1

“All things are permitted,” but not all things are beneficial. “All things are permitted,” but not all things build up. Do not seek your own advantage but that of the other. Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience, for “the earth and its fullness are the Lord’s.” If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. But if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then do not eat it, out of consideration for the one who informed you and for the sake of conscience—I mean the other’s conscience, not your own. For why should my freedom be subject to the judgment of someone else’s conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why should I be denounced because of that for which I give thanks?

So, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage but that of many, so that they may be saved.

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.



Exegesis

As we progress through 1 Corinthians, certain themes continue to arise. Just as our passage from 1 Corinthians 3 and 1 Corinthians 6 shared the temple metaphor, last week’s passage from 1 Corinthians 6 and this week’s passage from 1 Corinthians 10 both open with a repetition of the same basic slogan “all things are permitted.” Though 1 Corinthians 10:23 does not include the “for me” at the end of the slogan, the Greek makes clear that this is meant to be the same slogan Paul quotes in 1 Corinthians 6:12. Once again, Paul addresses an issue arising around how the Corinthian Christians are to live out their freedom in Christ. And, once again, the issue centers around food. Yet, where Paul seeks to reassert the importance of living in the body in chapter 6, his concern in chapter 10 is how the Corinthian Christians exercise their freedom in relationship to other Christians and society as a whole.

After repeating his amendment that not all things are beneficial, Paul adds an additional corrective to the slogan that hints at the communal nature of the reflections that follow. The Greek *oikodomeo*, translated as “build up,” literally means “to build house,” or, when used metaphorically in the context of Paul’s ecclesiology, “to promote growth in Christian wisdom, affection, grace, virtue, holiness, blessedness.” While it might be tempting to read this verse in relation to the individual Christian, Paul’s use of *oikodomeo* firmly plants this teaching in the communal sphere. Not only does this harken back to his discussion of the Corinthian Christians as God’s building in chapter 3, but it also serves as a preview for his extended reflections on the nature of the church in chapters 12 and 14. Then, in case his readers are still wondering how to tell whether or not a choice or action is beneficial and builds up, Paul adds that we should seek the advantage or the good of the other rather than ourselves. Far from being an admonition to become an emotional doormat or live with no personal boundaries, Paul calls for a humility that recognizes that the good of the other does not preclude the good of the self, but seeking only the good of the self may very well lead to harm to the other.

Paul then applies his teaching in verses 23-24 to two practical issues facing the Corinthians: 1. Buying meat sold in the market and 2. An invitation to eat a meal with an unbeliever. In his discussion of both of these cases, Paul encourages his readers to recognize that neither of these are a matter of personal conscience. Because idols are not real, there is no issue with Christians buying meat from the market that was sacrificed to idols, nor is there any issue with a Christian eating a meal with an unbeliever. An important aspect of freedom in Christ is the freedom to recognize the empty power of idols. Therefore, eating meat sold at the market and eating a meal with an unbeliever do not risk going against a Christian's individual conscience. For the Christian that recognizes that idols are not real, both of these issues are morally neutral. However, Paul also teaches that if a Christian is informed that the meat at a meal with an unbeliever has been sacrificed to idols, then the Christian should not eat it. Note that the issue in Paul's enjoinder not to eat the meat has nothing to do with idols and everything to do with the Christian's witness to unbelievers and care for other Christians. In chapter 8, we find more background about this disagreement among the Corinthian Christians. One group, likely the more educated, recognized the impotence of idols while another group still retained some superstition about eating meat sacrificed to idols. Rather than admonishing the latter group to be more like the educated group, Paul calls the Corinthian Christians to recognize that the freedom of their conscience means they are free to be open to the conscience of their neighbors. Being a stumbling block for another, be it an unbeliever or a fellow Christian, is of greater consequence than choosing to eat meat sacrificed to idols.

To drive his point home, Paul essentially repeats the teaching in verses 23-24 in verses 31-33, with the added exhortation to do all things to the glory of God and to not offend—that is, be a stumbling block—to others “so that they might be saved.” Paul simultaneously makes two important claims in these verses. First, he essentially summarizes what it means to love God and love neighbor—to glorify God in all we do *and also* not be a stumbling block to others, which is also critical to glorifying God. Second, Paul encourages Christians to commit to loving God and neighbor in this way because salvation is on the line. Salvation, then, is the context in which Paul's instruction for Christian living occurs. This means that the answers that Paul gives to the Corinthian Christians' difficulties are not as important as the wisdom behind them. Choosing not to cause a neighbor to stumble with your actions will look different in various contexts. Yet the wisdom of seeking what is advantageous for salvation for others remains the same. Hence, the whole of Paul's teaching can be summed up in 11:1—in all things, seek after imitating Christ. In this way, we gain the wisdom, discernment, and perspective to love God and one another well as we navigate differences, difficulties, and disagreements in our churches and in our world.



Sermon Notes

INTRODUCTION

As we continue our exploration of health through Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, today we turn to social health. Whereas we might have a general understanding of emotional health and definitely physical health, we likely come to the idea of social health with different assumptions and expectations. For our purposes today, social health indicates “people's relationships and interactions with family, friends, co-workers, and community members [which] can have a major impact on their health and well-being” (<https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/browse-objectives/social-and-community-context>). Social health helps us put words to a reality that we might not think about very much, which is that our individual health—body, mind, and emotions—is impacted by our interactions with other people in our community. In addition, then, how we interact with others impacts *their* health, as well. After spending two weeks in 1 Corinthians, we probably shouldn't be surprised by the role social health plays in our individual health and vice versa. Paul is all about community and the impact we have on one another. Belonging, we learned from Brené Brown, is essential to

surviving and thriving as human beings. Today, though, we are going to drill down deeper into this topic by exploring the wisdom Paul offers for making decisions with social health as a priority in light of our responsibility to love God, neighbor, and self.

SERMON NOTES

1. Last week, we encountered a return of the temple metaphor from chapter 3 as Paul expounded on the importance of how we live in the body as we exercise freedom in Christ in chapter 6. Our individual bodies, as well as the gathering of our bodies as a Christian community, are God’s temple, God’s dwelling place on Earth. This week, we encounter the return of another portion of chapter 6. In fact, if you have a physical copy of your Bible with you, you will find that 1 Corinthians 6:12 and 1 Corinthians 10:23 open with almost the exact same words. The Greek also reflects this near identical repetition of the slogan “all things are permitted,” followed by Paul’s addition, “but not all things are beneficial.” Though 10:23 does not include the “for me” at the end of the slogan, this is meant to be the same slogan Paul quotes in 6:12. Once again, Paul addresses an issue regarding how the Corinthian Christians are to live out their freedom in Christ. And, once again, the issue centers around food. Yet, Paul’s concern in chapter 10 centers more directly around how the Corinthian Christians exercise their freedom in relationship to other Christians and society as a whole.
2. In the second part of verse 23, Paul again repeats the slogan, this time adding a new amendment: “but not all things build up.” The Greek *oikodomeo*, translated as “build up,” literally means “to build house,” or, when used metaphorically in this context, “to promote growth in Christian wisdom, affection, grace, virtue, holiness, blessedness.” Paul’s use of *oikodomeo* firmly plants this teaching in the social sphere, not least for the ways the notion of “building up” harkens back to his discussion of the Corinthian Christians as God’s building in chapter 3. But then, you may wonder, how do we know if a choice or action is beneficial or builds up? Paul answers this unspoken question, stating that we should seek the advantage or the good of the other rather than ourselves. For clarity’s sake, Paul is not asking us to become emotional doormats or remove all boundaries. Neither option fits the criteria of being beneficial. Rather, Paul calls for a humility that recognizes that the good of our neighbor does not preclude the good of the self, but seeking only the good of the self may very well lead to harm for our neighbors.
3. Always keeping the practical in mind, Paul applies this teaching to two case studies: 1. Buying meat sold in the market and 2. An invitation to eat a meal with an unbeliever. As a bit of background, during this time, some or all—scholars are mixed on this—of the meat sold in the meat market in Corinth was sacrificed to idols, either to one of the pantheon of Roman gods or to the emperor. Thus, at the very least, when a Christian went to the meat market, they had no way of knowing if the meat they were buying had been sacrificed to an idol or not. The same situation would apply to eating a meal in the home of an unbeliever. In both cases, Paul encourages his readers to recognize that neither of these are a matter of personal conscience. Because idols are not real, there is no issue with Christians buying meat from the market whether it was sacrificed to idols or not. There is also no issue with a Christian eating a meal with an unbeliever for the same reasons. An important aspect of freedom in Christ is the freedom to recognize the empty power of idols. For the Christian that recognizes that idols are not real, both of these issues are morally neutral.
4. However, Paul also teaches that if a Christian is informed that the meat at a meal with an unbeliever has been sacrificed to idols, then the Christian should not eat it. Note that the issue in Paul’s enjoinder not to eat the meat has nothing to do with idols and everything to do with the Christian’s witness to unbelievers and care for other Christians. In chapter 8, we find more background about this disagreement among the Corinthian Christians. One group, likely the more educated, recognized the impotence of idols while another group still retained some superstition about eating meat sacrificed to idols. Rather than admonishing the latter group to be more like the educated group, Paul calls the Corinthian Christians to recognize that the freedom of their conscience means they are free to be open to the conscience of their neighbors. Being a stumbling block for another, be it an unbeliever or a fellow Christian, is of greater consequence than choosing to eat meat sacrificed to idols.

5. Today, we might find the issue facing the Christians in Corinth silly or, at the very least, irrelevant to our own lives. Our worshipping communities and neighborhoods are not facing division and scandal based on who eats meat sacrificed to idols and who does not. Yet, the wisdom behind Paul's instruction for the Corinthian Christians remains timely and applicable to the problems we are facing in our communities today. At the core of Paul's teaching is a concern for the vulnerable in the community. In the case of Corinth, Paul is concerned about the vulnerability of those whose faith is not yet strong enough to let go of previous superstitions. That said, often the only opportunity the poor had to eat meat during Paul's day was on civic holidays when meat sacrificed to gods or the emperor was passed out to the people as part of the celebrations. By maintaining that that meat was not defiled and that Christians were free to eat it, Paul was ensuring access to a critical resource for the poorest in the community. Thus, Paul balances between what is beneficial and what builds up in his instruction to the Corinthian Christians.

6. Just as in Paul's day, we too must grapple with how to make communal decisions that prioritize the vulnerable and poor in our communities. According to 2020 census data, the poverty rate was 11.4%, which means approximately 37.2 million people were living in poverty in 2020, with poverty defined as making an annual income of less than \$27,131 per year for a family of four with two children. Of those living in poverty, 19.5% were African American, 17.0% were Latino, 8.1% were Asian, and 8.2% were white (<https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2021/demo/p60-273.pdf>). These statistics are mirrored in Kansas—of the 323,189 of people living in poverty, 23.6% were African American, 19.1% were Latino, 21.6% were Native American, 11.6% were Asian, and 8.9% were white (<https://talkpoverty.org/state-year-report/kansas-2020-report/>).

Looking at these numbers, the income disparity along racial lines in the United States becomes clear. This disparity is not just present at the poverty line. In 2016, the median household income for a Black household was 60% of the median white household income (<https://voxeu.org/article/perceptions-racial-gaps-their-causes-and-ways-reduce-them>). The economic and historic issues that contribute to the greater rates of poverty in Black, Latino, Native American, and Asian communities are complex. Yet Paul would ask us not to turn away from the vulnerability of our neighbors living in poverty because the issues seem too large to manage. Paul would also remind us that becoming lost in the enormity of the problems often does not result in doing good in the communities where we live. Rather, Paul points us to the importance of listening to one another and working to find solutions that benefit and build up the vulnerable among us. Whether it's supporting a Black-owned local business, promoting the work of your local food bank, or advocating for better wages for women and people of color in your community, when we listen and recognize the struggles of the vulnerable and we prioritize the well-being of the vulnerable, we are given opportunities to imagine and enact change that benefits the social health of the whole community.

7. One way churches can connect and work with neighbors

Other Social Health Issues to Explore

Addressing basic needs in our communities can enhance social health. There are *many* basic needs related to social health that you can address with your congregation. Depending on your context, other issues that you might want to explore include:

- **Connecting with Neighbors Experiencing Poverty:** Improving and sustaining social health in relationship to poverty is not just about providing goods and services but connecting with neighbors of all socioeconomic backgrounds as vital community members. One way churches can connect with neighbors while also meeting a critical need is by serving as a sponsor or site supervisor for Summer Food Service Program services in your community (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/sfsp-fact-sheets>). Churches can also work with local extension service programs to connect community members to services and programs offered by extension agents, including cooking classes, nutrition education, and gardening education. You can find the extension offices by state here: <https://gardenologist.org/cooperative-extension-directory-for-all-50-states-dc-and-puerto-rico/>.
- **Increasing Trust for Community Safety:** In light of the increasingly complex scenarios that fall under the duties of local police, one way to alleviate the burden on police while also increasing community safety and trust is to support and fund a co-responder model for behavior health calls and stops. In a co-responder model, mental health professionals ride and work alongside law enforcement officers and can contribute to positive outcomes and prioritizing treatment over incarceration for persons experiencing a mental health crisis. To learn more, visit <https://csgjusticecenter.org/publications/developing-and-implementing-your-co-responder-program/>.

experiencing poverty is by educating families who participate in supplemental nutrition programs on ways to utilize the food they receive. For instance, in the state of Kansas, a family of four making less than \$51,338/year with at least one member who is pregnant, breastfeeding, postpartum, and/or a child under 5 is eligible for WIC. Some of the foods eligible for WIC include tofu, dry beans, fish, and whole grains (<https://www.kdhe.ks.gov/1198/WIC-Approved-Foods>). While these foods are full of nutrition that mothers and children need, if a family does not know how to prepare these foods, they are less likely to take advantage of them. What an opportunity to marshal the gifts and assets of our church to offer cooking classes to the community that feature simple recipes and instruction for preparing WIC eligible foods so that families can benefit as much as possible from the assistance they receive. For some families, the difference between being able to prepare nutritious foods or not may be as simple as not being able to afford a crockpot. What if we joined forces with other community groups and held a crockpot drive to help families in our community? These are just two ideas of so many that can bring together the needs and assets of our neighborhood to help all of us thrive.

8. Paul concludes this portion of his letter by repeating the teaching in verses 23-24 in verses 31-33, with the added exhortation to do all things to the glory of God and to not offend—that is, be a stumbling block—to others “so that they might be saved.” Paul makes two significant claims in these verses. First, he summarizes what it means to love God and love neighbor—to glorify God in all we do *and also* not be a stumbling block to others. Second, Paul encourages Christians to commit to loving God and neighbor in this way because salvation is on the line. Salvation is the context in which Paul’s instruction for Christian living occurs. This means that the answers that Paul gives to the Corinthian Christians’ difficulties are not as important as the wisdom behind them. Choosing not to cause a neighbor to stumble with your actions will look different in various contexts. Yet, the wisdom of seeking what is advantageous for salvation for others remains the same. Hence, the whole of Paul’s teaching can be summed up in 11:1—in all things, seek after imitating Christ. In this way, we gain the wisdom, discernment, and perspective to love God and one another well as we navigate differences, difficulties, and disagreements in our churches and in our world.



Benediction

As you leave today, may you be blessed with the opportunity to notice the needs around you, the inspiration to be part of the solution, and the courage to act as an imitator of Christ in all that you do.

Amen.

For a printable bulletin insert - [click here](#)

Sermon Guide

Week 4





Call to Worship

Creator God, who made us to be living, feeling, communal people...

Guide us on the path to health and life everlasting.

Saving God, who watches us struggle to care for the bodies you created, both our own and our neighbors'...

Save us to live in health and life everlasting.

Sustaining God, who made us to need one another and mourns when we choose division instead of following in the way of Christ...

Help us take care of each other on our journey toward health and life everlasting.

Loving God, who empowers us to love one another, diverse yet unified in God's love...

Lead us into health and life everlasting as the Body of Christ.

Amen.



Hymn Selections:

- **“Many Gifts, One Spirit”**
United Methodist Hymnal #114
- **“The Gift of Love”**
United Methodist Hymnal #408
- **“Christ, from Whom All Blessings Flow”**
United Methodist Hymnal #550



Children's Sermon

After the children gather, say:

Good morning! We are on our last week of this series about health. The last three weeks, we talked about belonging and emotional health, being God's temple and physical health, and helping each other as part of social health. Today, we are going to talk about spiritual health. And to do that, we're going to hear one last time from Paul as he's writing this letter to the church in Corinth. We've talked about the different problems that these new Christians were having, and this week's problem is a doozy. As they were learning to be a community, these Christians were discovering that they each had different gifts. Do you have something that you are really good at? (*Wait for answers.*) No matter how big or small—whether you're good at singing or drawing or giving hugs—our gifts are things that we can use to love God and love each other. The problem at the church in Corinth is that the people were starting to say that some gifts were better than others, and it was causing a lot of fighting.

So, Paul responds by having them imagine a body. So, look at your body right now. All of our bodies have things that are the same and things that are different, and that's OK. What Paul wanted them to notice is that a body has lots of parts. You have hands and eyes and feet and all of those parts work together to help us do things. Now, Paul says, what if your foot just suddenly said it didn't belong to your body because it wasn't a hand?! That's kind of silly, right? Or, what if your eye decided it didn't need the rest of you and went off on its own? That just doesn't make any sense!

Though Paul writes this as something of a joke, the meaning behind it is pretty serious. All of who each of us are, including our gifts, is a part of the Body of Christ. When we start saying that your gifts are more important than mine or my gifts are more important than yours, we're like that foot that says it doesn't belong or that eye that wants to go off by itself. And ultimately, Paul says all of those gifts are only useful when we use them with love. When we work to love each other as God loves us, we realize that we are all part of the same body, the Body of Christ. Because we are part of the same body, we need to work together in love. And when we work together in our love, your spiritual health, my spiritual health, and our spiritual health get better and better.

For our final exercise today, turn to a neighbor (*wait for them to find a neighbor*) and give them a hug (*or air hug if that's better in your context*) and say, "We are the Body of Christ." Now, turn to the congregation and give them a big air hug and say, "We are the Body of Christ."

Let's pray:

Loving God, your love gives us gifts to share with each other and your love uses all of our gifts in the Body of Christ. Show us how to love you, love ourselves, and love our neighbors well.

Amen.



Scripture • 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

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. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members yet one body. 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.” On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect, whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.



Scripture • 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

If I speak in the tongues of humans and of angels but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions and if I hand over my body so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.



Exegesis

While one of the more well-known passages from 1 Corinthians, Paul's extended metaphorical use of the body in his explication of spiritual gifts and the workings of the Christian community in chapter 12 has quite an odd, almost comical character to it. In the middle of listing the various kinds of spiritual gifts, suddenly we encounter a disembodied ear, a talking eye, and an argument between the head and feet. In the midst of two millennia of rich and robust theological reflection on this passage, it is important not to lose the disruptive humor that pops up in this week's reading. Nor should we lose the efficacy of that humor. Humor surprises us into receiving new insights about relationships and phenomena we would otherwise take for granted.

For Paul, the body that Christians belong to is not an organism that takes shape as believers are added to it. Rather, through baptism, Christians are incorporated into the pre-existing Body of Christ. Paul's overarching emphasis, then, is unity within the Christian community, but not unity that erases difference or that is defined by worldly power. Rather, Paul is concerned that the Corinthian Christians exercise unity under the headship of Christ who exercises wisdom and power that appears as folly to the world. In fact, the folly of the Body of Christ comes to the fore in verses 22-25. In Paul's day, the metaphor of the body was used rhetorically to reinforce the hierarchies of power that made up the status quo. Identifying some members of the body as weak and others as strong was a way of keeping the vulnerable and marginalized under the domination of strong and powerful rulers and governments. Having demonstrated the ridiculousness of the Corinthian church's divisions and arguments over the importance of various spiritual gifts over others, Paul disrupts their expectations of the bodily metaphor by lifting up the importance of the weak members of the body in relation to the strong members. This is not merely an instance of Paul bringing low the powerful and lifting up the lowly. In this disruption, Paul challenges the measures by which members of the body and their gifts are judged as strong or weak. To some degree, these are no longer helpful identifiers because the Body of Christ operates out of unity and mutual care for all members.

Verse 27 brings Paul's message home by emphasizing, first, that Christians are the body of Christ and *only then* individual members of it. As this simple statement ties the previous 15 verses together, we must not allow ourselves to disconnect from the embodied reality of the body metaphor that Paul uses to describe the life of the church as Christ's Body. By using the human body as a referent for the Body of Christ, Paul reinforces and expands upon his question in chapter 6: do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you? Made part of Christ's body the church, Christians are thus not only the dwelling place of God but the embodiment of God's gracious, salvific love not in some abstract sense but in the daily, mundane realities of human life in the neighborhood. Further, this reality is not just an individual reality but an embodied *communal* reality. How we live as a community in Christ impacts how we embody God's love in the world.

For Paul, any teaching about living the Christian life in community cannot be complete without a deep understanding of the love God shows us and therefore calls us to live with one another. 1 Corinthians 13 shows up as something of a disruption in the middle of Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts and the Body of Christ. However, that does not mean this is an unintentional disruption. Rather, in the midst of lists of spiritual gifts and calling the Corinthian Christians to unity as the Body of Christ, Paul asserts that none of it is worthwhile without love. Love, then, is not a spiritual gift in the same sense as prophecy or speaking in tongues. It is a gift that *all* receive and is therefore the gift that *all* members of the Body must work to cultivate. Hence, love is also the answer to all of the divisions facing the Christians in Corinth, as well as for Christians today. And while love may seem like too simplistic an answer to all the world's problems, Paul tells us that no act, no matter how good, has worth without love.



Sermon Notes

INTRODUCTION

No discussion of 1 Corinthians, particularly a discussion about health, would be complete without a foray into Paul's lengthy discussion of spiritual gifts and the Body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12. Unfortunately, the reverence and familiarity with which we approach today's reading can often make us miss the humor lurking in these verses. A disembodied ear declares its unworthiness compared to the eye, an eye imagines it can be a body all on its own, and an argument breaks out between the head and feet. It might be a little creepy, but there's a comic strip somewhere in there! While this humor may feel surprising and uncomfortable, this passage invites us to live into the humor as it surprises us into receiving new insights about relationships and phenomena we would otherwise take for granted. Today, we are going to explore the disruptive surprise of spiritual health within the Body of Christ. In a world that often treats our faith journey as an individualistic endeavor, Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 12 opens pathways for exploring the deeply communal nature of spiritual health, inviting us into deeper belonging with God, self, and neighbor as we learn to embody the love that binds us together as the Body of Christ.

SERMON NOTES

1. When we dive into Paul's teaching on the church as the Body of Christ, we begin by investigating the nature of this body. Does God create the body out of the many members—that is, us—or are we, the members—made part of a body that already exists? When we read closely, verses 12 and 13 presume that the one body that we are all baptized into already exists. In these verses, Paul makes clear that his first priority is unity in the Body of Christ. Importantly, with Christ as the head of the body, unity in the Body of Christ does not erase differences or mimic worldly power. Rather, the Body of Christ operates with a unity that appears as folly to the world, which comes to the fore in verses 22-25.
2. In Paul's day, the metaphor of the body was used rhetorically to reinforce the hierarchies of power that made up the status quo. Identifying some members of the body as weak and others as strong was a way of keeping the vulnerable and marginalized under the domination of strong and powerful rulers and governments. After using humor to demonstrate the ridiculousness of the Corinthian church's divisions and arguments over the importance of various spiritual gifts over others, Paul disrupts their expectations of the bodily metaphor by lifting up the importance of the weak members of the body in relation to the strong members. This is not merely an instance of Paul bringing low the powerful and lifting up the lowly. In this disruption, Paul challenges the measures by which members of the body and their gifts are judged as strong or weak. To some degree, these are no longer helpful identifiers because the Body of Christ operates out of unity and mutual care for all members.
3. So, what does this mean for spiritual health? One popular definition of spiritual health in public health circles says that spiritual health is: a state of being where an individual is able to deal with day-to-day life in a manner which leads to the realization of one's full potential; meaning and purpose of life; and happiness from within (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3263147/>). When we consider this definition of spiritual health in light of his teaching about the Body of Christ, we realize that, for Paul, tending our spiritual health requires *community*. To exercise our gifts, find meaning in life, and live into happiness as the Body of Christ, we need each other. Unfortunately, though centuries separate us, Christians today still face a significant obstacle to spiritual health that the Corinthian Christians also faced: individualism. Like the church in Corinth, when Christians today overemphasize individual devotion or prioritize their personal faith practices over communal faith practices, we disconnect ourselves from the Christian community in which we are called to live in cooperation with other Christians as members of the Body of Christ.
4. The balance and relationship between individual and communal practice of the Christian faith has been a topic

of theological and pastoral reflection for centuries. In the eighteenth century, John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, reflected on this same issue many times. In his 1781 sermon entitled “On Zeal,” Wesley states that “without zeal it is impossible, either to make any considerable progress in religion ourselves, or to do any considerable service to our neighbour, whether in temporal or spiritual things.” Christian zeal, for Wesley, is a way of describing the spiritual and theological emotion or affection that is, in essence, charity. For Wesley, charity means the love of God and neighbor. And while Wesley allows that there may be some measure of love without zeal, zeal “is fervent love. True Christian zeal is no other than the flame of love.”

5. This love, Wesley says, “sits upon the throne which is erected in the inmost soul.” Wesley’s sense of Christian zeal aligns with Paul’s instruction to the Corinthians in chapter 13. Just as in Wesley, Paul unites teaching about living the Christian life in community with a deep understanding of the love God shows us and therefore calls us to live with one another. 1 Corinthians 13 shows up as another disruption in the middle of Paul’s discussion of spiritual gifts and the Body of Christ. Far from being an unintentional disruption, in the midst of lists of spiritual gifts and calling the Corinthian Christians to unity as the Body of Christ, Paul asserts that none of it is worthwhile without love. Love, then, is not a spiritual gift in the same sense as prophecy or speaking in tongues. It is a gift that *all* receive and is therefore the gift that *all* members of the Body must cultivate.

6. Later in “On Zeal,” Wesley discusses how the Christian should live out and cultivate this love through works of piety and work of mercy. Works of piety, he says, are acts of devotion like reading Scripture, praying, and receiving the Lord’s supper, while works of mercy are outward acts Christians are called to perform that “relieve the distress of our neighbour, whether in body or soul.” In cases where works of piety and works of mercy interfere with one another, Wesley says we are to prioritize caring for our neighbor over works of piety, though both are necessary. Yet for Wesley, our greatest zeal and effort ought to go not to works of piety or works of mercy, or even to the church or our personal growth in Christian virtues, but to love itself. In something of an improvisation on 1 Corinthians 13, Wesley says “The church, the ordinances, outward works of every kind, yea, all other holy tempers, are inferior to this, and rise in value only as they approach nearer and nearer to it” (<http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-92-on-zeal/>).

7. As the Body of Christ, our spiritual health is worked out in community with one another and with all of our neighbors as we learn to love each other well. So many of the other areas of health we have discussed in this sermon series are opportunities to improve spiritual health, as well as emotional, physical, and social health. For instance, consider your neighbors here at church who need healthier food options at church gatherings to tend to their physical health needs. Having a policy in place that all gatherings around food—whether it’s snacks in the narthex or Sunday potlucks or Wednesday night dinners—include many and plentiful fresh fruit, vegetable, and whole grain options for all to enjoy. Not only would this benefit physical health in our community, but as a way of making sure *everyone* gathered can eat together, we would also improve our spiritual health as members of the Body of Christ. Making the healthy choice the easy choice is a loving way to widen access and participation in the life of our church community.

8. The church can also become a place that offers community exercise opportunities to our neighborhood. By setting up a prayer walk through our campus, offering yoga or tai chi classes, or seeking a grant to offer a bike share program to our community, we can benefit the physical health of our neighbors while also creating opportunities for greater connection in our neighborhood. The more we connect with our neighbors, the more we offer opportunities for belonging, a critical aspect of emotional health that all of us need. And when we do this out of love, out of a genuine desire to love God and love neighbor well, we exercise our spiritual health muscles, becoming stronger as the Body of Christ as we participate in extending God’s grace to our community.



Benediction

As you go into your week, know that the love of God dwells in you, empowering you to use your gifts to cultivate love and health in your own life and in the lives of your neighbors today and every day.

Amen.

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