A SHORT BIBLE STUDY

Growing Together as the Church

Living It Out · Book 7



Unity, community, and the use of our gifts

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Trinfinity Enterprises

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Contents

Introduction.....5
1 Members of one body.....5
2 What weakens our fellowship.....6
3 Using what God has given.....7
4 Staying close enough to care.....8

A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Book

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this book direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

Introduction

God has not called His people to live without one another. We need encouragement, correction, help, and opportunities to serve. Unity gets real when we actually do those things. I want a church life that reflects Christ in the way we care for people, including the ones whose gifts, experiences, and preferences differ from mine.

I have led Bible studies, served as a lay pastor and helped lead youth mission trips. No Christian is built to walk alone. I wrote this book for church members who want real fellowship, not just sitting in rows once a week. When each person uses the gifts God gave, the whole church grows strong together.

1 Members of one body

First Corinthians 12 (SLB) describes a body with different members. Their differences do not make them unnecessary. That picture speaks to the proud person and to the discouraged one. I should not act as though the church depends only on my contribution, and I should not assume I have nothing useful to give.

The passage calls for care when one member suffers and shared joy when another is honored. That reaches beyond attendance. It asks whether we notice people, whether we respond when they need help, and whether another person's recognition can be received without resentment.

Some jobs are too big for one person. A family, a work crew, or a team learns quickly why different contributions matter. The church's unity, however, has a deeper basis than convenience. We belong to Christ. Our service should reflect His care for the people who belong to Him.

I want to resist the tendency to value only what is visible. Preparation, practical help, patient conversation, and faithful prayer may happen away from a platform. A healthy community learns to appreciate service without turning every contribution into a competition for notice.

For five straight years I helped lead youth mission trips to Baja, Mexico, with teams of 16 to 45 kids. A trip like that only works when everyone does a part. That is 1 Corinthians 12 in action. A church works the way God designed when every member plays his part.

2 What weakens our fellowship

Pride can turn a difference into a contest over who matters most. When I need to appear right in every conversation, other people become obstacles rather than fellow believers. Humility makes room to listen while still taking truth seriously.

Some disagreements involve the central claims of the gospel. Others concern matters on which faithful Christians reach different conclusions. I should not treat every preference as a test of salvation. I hold a pre-tribulation view of the Rapture, and I explain it in Living in Hope of the Return of Christ. Disagreement

over its timing does not determine a person's salvation.

That distinction does not make study unnecessary. I should know why I hold a position and be willing to explain it from Scripture. But contempt is never the right way to defend it.

Bitterness and unforgiveness also weaken fellowship. A grievance carried from one relationship into the next can make the whole community feel unsafe. I need to address wrong truthfully and seek repair. Unity requires more than asking everybody else to be easier to live with.

When I was drifting, I kept people at a distance so nobody would ask hard questions. I hid my drinking from almost everyone, even a friend of more than 40 years. Fellowship weakens fastest when we trade honesty for polite small talk.

3 Using what God has given

> *And having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: whether prophecy, according to the proportion of the faith; or ministry, in the ministry; or the one who teaches, in the teaching; or the one who exhorts, in the exhortation; the one who gives, in generosity; the one who leads, in diligence; the one who shows mercy, in cheerfulness.*
>
> **Romans 12:6-8 (SLB)**

Romans 12:6-8 (SLB) names different gifts and calls for their exercise. Service should be practiced in serving. Teaching should be practiced in teaching.

Generosity, leadership, and mercy are also described with attention to how they are carried out. The emphasis is on using what God has given.

Natural talents and spiritual gifts are not the same thing. Romans 12 (SLB) does not list musical talent or medical training, but God can still use those abilities when we serve others.

Finding where to serve can start with whatever job needs doing. Offer help, listen to those who know the need, and receive feedback. I do not need a public title before I can encourage someone, give practical assistance, or make room for another person's growth.

I also need to remain teachable. A willingness to serve does not mean I already know how every task should be done. Preparation, supervision, and dependable follow-through can be expressions of humility. A gift is for the good of others, not a reason to dodge the work.

When I started leading Bible studies and writing study guides, I did not think of myself as a scholar. My teaching at work was analytical and regimented. With the Bible I take a softer, more personal approach, because people are not a checklist. God takes ordinary skills and shapes them for His people. You do not need a title to serve. You need to use what He put in your hands.

4 Staying close enough to care

> *and let us consider one another for stirring up of love and of good works, not forsaking the assembling together of ourselves, as **is the** custom of some, but encouraging **one another**, and so much the more as you see the day drawing near.*
>
> **Hebrews 10:24-25 (SLB)**

Hebrews 10:24-25 (SLB) connects gathering with encouraging one another toward love and good works. It gives fellowship a purpose. I am not simply present to receive something. I also have a responsibility to help another believer remain faithful.

There is a difference between time alone with God and a pattern of avoiding every relationship that could bring help or correction. Solitude can refresh us. Isolation can leave us without people who know what is happening in our lives. I need enough honest connection for care to become possible.

A good start can be smaller than a new program. Learn a person's name. Follow up on a need. Make room for someone who does not already know the group. If I have withdrawn because of a hurt, I may need support in finding a healthy way to reconnect.

I want unity to be visible in the way we live together. We will not agree on every detail, and we will sometimes fail one another. We can still practice repentance, forgiveness, and faithful service. A church grows in strength when people remain willing

to love the real members of the body, rather than an imagined community that never disappoints.

In my lowest season, I had made choices that hurt my marriage and the people closest to me. Hiding made it worse. Things began to change when a pastor and a few trusted men stayed close enough to tell me the truth. You cannot carry someone's burden from across the parking lot.

Growing Together as the Church

✦ ✦ ✦

God never meant for His people to go it alone. This book looks at what it means to be members of one body, what weakens our fellowship, how to use the gifts God has given, and how to stay close enough to care.

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us.

Romans 12:6 (SLB)

Book 7 of 10 in the collection Living It Out

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