

INTRODUCTION

Open your Bibles please to Romans, chapter 12. I'm preaching through the book of Romans verse after verse. If you did not bring a Bible look there in the pew rack and you should find a copy of the Bible and also maybe somebody beside you will offer to share his or her copy. We are an open Bible kind of church, which means we open our Bibles and keep them open, and we study from the word of God.

Today I want to talk to you about "How beautiful is the Body of Christ." Now you must admit that some human bodies are more beautiful than others, but for sure the most beautiful body is what we call the church, the body of Christ. Today we are going to be looking at a couple of questions to ask yourself.

Sometimes too many questions can become a little irritating. If you have ever been on a long trip and had little kids in the back seat, you know they constantly ask, "Are we there yet? How much farther do we have to go?" I heard about one fellow who had driven all day with his three children in the back seat. They had not been gone five minutes when they started asking, "Daddy, are we there yet? Daddy, how much longer? Daddy are we there yet?" Finally, he had all he could take. He turned and pointed his fingers to those kids and said, "It is going to take us all day to get there. We won't get there until it is dark so nobody ask me again, 'Are we almost there?'" So he pulled off and it was quiet for about five minutes and one little voice in the back seat said, "Daddy, is it almost dark yet?"

I hope these questions that we ask today are not irritating. I hope that they are informing and help us understand who we are in relationship to Jesus. Look at Romans 12:1-2. Last week we talked about how if we are going to be totally committed to Jesus it means that we offer our bodies to God once and for all, "God, I am yours." In order to do that, verse two says that we must not allow the world out there to conform us, to press us into their mold. Instead, we ought to be allowing God to transform us, to metamorphose us by changing the way we think about things.

Immediately you may be thinking, "All right, if I am supposed to think differently, give me an example of how I should be thinking differently." We have it right here in Romans 12:3-5, "For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, (that means to be serious in your self evaluation) in accordance with the measure of faith that God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, (that means our physical body) and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."

I want to introduce next week's topic, verse six, "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us." Now Paul is going to mention seven spiritual gifts and we will talk about that next week. He starts by saying in verse six, "If a man's gift is prophesying let him use it in proportion to his faith."

I. WHO AM I? Know Yourself Realistically!

Let's answer two questions today. You are the only one who can answer these questions. The first question we need to ask our self is "Who am I?"

An ancient philosopher said, "Know thyself." Who am I? I'm going to encourage you to know yourself realistically, to develop an honest, serious evaluation of who you are. Somebody said "I'm not who I think I am and I'm not who you think I am. I am who I think you think I am." In other words, you must understand how other people see you, but more importantly, you must understand how God sees you so you can see yourself realistically.

If you will look at verse three Paul says there is a real danger here. If you're not careful you will think too highly of yourself. Let me mention two extremes.

1. Extreme #1: Over-Estimation

Extreme number one is what I call over-estimation. Many people overestimate their value and their worth. They say, "I'm somebody. I'm the cat's meow." The person in this extreme thinks they are right and everybody else is wrong. They think they are the only one who can do the job right. Nobody else can do it any better than they can. As I said, they are the kind of people that stand in front of the mirror, look at themselves and sing "How Great Thou Art." They think, "I'm just the pinnacle of greatness." It's like Mohammed Ali saying, "I am the greatest." They may not say that out loud, but secretly they really think they are the greatest on earth. Satan comes up and whispers this to people who are prone in that direction. Satan says, "You are better than everybody else, in fact you're as good as God." Satan doesn't want you to worship Satan. Satan wants you to worship yourself. He wants to let you believe that you're just as good as God and if you're not careful, you will fall into that trap of thinking that you are so special.

I heard about a man who was driving down the expressway in rush hour traffic. Suddenly his cell phone rings and his wife says, "Honey, you need to be careful driving home because I just heard on the news that there is an idiot going in the wrong direction on the same expressway you're on." He said, "It's not just one; there are hundreds of them!"

Some people are that way. They think they are the only one right and everybody else is wrong. Now some of you may think, "You know, God I'm doing you a favor. Here I am. I'm in church today. God, you are so fortunate that you've got me." Some people think that they are totally indispensable and irreplaceable.

I came across an interesting little poem:

Sometime when your feeling important,
Sometime when your ego is up,
Sometime when you take it for granted
That you're the only prize-winning pup,
Sometime when you feel that your absence
Would leave and unfillable hole,
Just follow these simple instructions
And see if it humbles your soul.

Take a bucket and fill it with water,
Put your hand in it up to the wrist.
Now pull it up fast and the hole that remains
Is the measure of how you'll be missed.
You may splash all you please,
As you enter and stir up the water galore,
But stop and you'll find in a minute
It's back where it was before.

Now throughout history there are always been individuals who thought they were indispensable. Winston Churchill said, "The cemeteries are filled with men who thought that they were indispensable." There is only one indispensable member of the body of Christ and it is the head, Jesus Christ himself. So don't make the mistake of overestimating your worth. If you lean in that direction I want to give you something.

Ego-Bursting confession: I am a fallen deformed sinner. There is still something in my personality, my sinful nature that I cannot completely trust.

We need to make that affirmation about who we are.

Did you know there is a member of Green Acres Baptist Church that I have an awful lot of trouble with? The guy that gives me more trouble than anybody else is my wife's first husband. I have a lot of trouble with that guy because sometimes I don't like what he does and the way he thinks. Even though I've been a Christian now for many years, I feel that in me there is still something I can't really trust. It is that old sinful nature. You say, "Aren't we forgiven sinners?" Yes, we are.

The Apostle Paul, when he was writing to Timothy, said this, "This is a worthy saying and worth accepting that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." Paul said, "I'm the chief sinner." He didn't say I used to be before I met Jesus on the road to Damascus. He said, "I *am* the chief of sinners."

Friends, we need to be careful about over-estimating our value and our worth. The Bible says, "Let him who stands take heed lest he fall." It says, "Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall." That is one extreme.

2. Extreme #2: Under-valuation

There are many in this room who say, "That's not my problem; my problem is the other extreme." I call it "under-valuation." You say, "I don't think I'm somebody big. I just think I'm worthless. I think I'm no good." By the way friend, if you grow up and your parents, teachers and friends say to you, "You good for nothing! You are a worthless piece of trash!" you're going to grow up believing that about yourself. That's not true either. Sometimes people walk around with their shoulders slumped saying, "I'm nothing. I'm nothing." And they think it's humility. That's not humility. It's poor posture. God doesn't want you to walk around saying you are nothing. You are somebody in Christ.

Now I have something else for you. If your problem is in this extreme, I have what I call a

Head-Raising confession: I am a loved, cherished, child of God. I now stand before God covered in the perfect righteousness of Jesus.

I'm talking to those of you who are saved. God looks at me right now covered in the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ." So don't go around saying, "I'm nothing. I'm nothing." You are a child of God and that's somebody mighty important. I like the last verse of the hymn, "The Solid Rock." It reads, When He shall come with trumpet sound/O may I then in Him be found/Dressed in His righteousness alone,/Faultless to stand before the throne.

It's true when Jesus comes back you want to be in Christ, but the glorious truth is: right now, this moment, if you are a Christian, you are in Christ and you are dressed in His righteousness alone and when God looks at you, He says, "There is a faultless, forgiven child of mine." So, don't make the mistake of either one of these extremes. Verse three says, "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, (but look at the last part of verse three) in accordance with the measure of faith."

3. Extreme #3: Proper self-esteem: Confidence without deceit

Now if you have enough faith, you come to what I call "proper self-esteem," a proper self-image. You will have unshakable confidence in God, but you won't be conceited about it because the confidence is in God, not in yourself. One time, someone said to me, "David, you look like you've got a lot of self-confidence." My reply to them was, "Well, that's kind of funny because I have absolutely no self-confidence. I don't have any more confidence in David Dykes than I have in the devil himself," and that's true. But I have great unshakable confidence in Jesus Christ.

In Philippians 3:3, Paul says, "I have no confidence in the flesh." But then look at Philippians 4:13. He said, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength. I can do all things through Christ."

I think a good example of the proper self-image of who we are in Christ can be seen in the life of John the Baptist. He was out there preaching in the Judean wilderness and thousands of people were flocking out from Jerusalem. He was preaching, he was baptizing. He was the most prominent, famous preacher of his time. Some of the Pharisees came to interview him – I imagine it was like a reporter from the *Jerusalem Post* – they came with their notepads and said, "John tell us . . . who are you? Now that's the same question we are answering here. John could have gone to this extreme and said, "Hey, I'm the most famous preacher in Judea. Just look at the crowds."

"Are you the Messiah, John?" John could have said, like other said before and after, "Yes, I'm the anointed of God." But he didn't say that. But when they said, "John, who are you?" He also didn't say, "I'm nobody. I'm nothing." He didn't say that either. They said, "John, who are you?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord

because Jesus is coming!' My job is to get the way ready for Him, to point people to Jesus." You see friend, that's a positive self-image. Some people would have looked at John and said, "He is so cocky." Well, he wasn't. He knew who he was in Christ Jesus. He wasn't over-valuing himself, nor was he undervaluing himself.

Jesus said the greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart. Then he said the second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. The reason some of us cannot love other people is because we really don't love ourselves. I'm not talk about being in love with yourself. That means that you see yourself as God sees you, a child of God. You've got to answer the question, "Who am I?" I call that "know yourself realistically."

II. HOW DO I FIT IN? See yourself relationally

The second question we're going to answer this morning is, How do I fit in? How do I fit into the body of Christ. I call this to see yourself relationally, how you relate to others around you. We're going to be talking about the body of Christ. Look at Romans 12:4, "Just as we have one body, (physical body) so we're all members of the body of Christ. Verse five, "so in Christ we who are many form one body and we all belong to each other."

As evangelical Christians, we emphasize the fact that every single individual must personally relate to God for personal conversion. Now that's sort of a keynote of evangelical Christians, but I think with the emphasis we put on that, we've neglected the important emphasis that we have relationally, horizontally with one other, how it's so absolutely essential and important to be a part of the church. Now I'm contrasting that with our Catholic friends who would teach that salvation is only through the church. We believe that salvation is through Christ, but I think we made a mistake of neglecting how important it is to be connected properly within the church, and that's relationally Christianity - how we relate to one another.

If you want to know what this passage is saying you need to make these four statements about who you are.

1. I am a member of the body of Christ

If you are a Christian you can say, "I'm a member of the body of Christ." In the New Testament, there are three graphic analogies of what the church is. They start with the letter 'B.' The *Body of Christ*. Also, the church is called the Bride of Christ. Jesus is the Bridegroom; we are the Bride. One day the bridegroom, Jesus, is going to come back and take us to his Father's house and we will have a great wedding celebration. If you are a Christian you can say, "I'm a member of the body of Christ." In the New Testament, there are three graphic analogies of what the church is. They start with the letter 'B.' The *Body of Christ*. Also, the church is called the Bride of Christ. Jesus is the Bridegroom; we are the Bride. One day the bridegroom, Jesus, is going to come back and take us to his Father's house and we will have a great wedding celebration. If you are a Christian you can say, "I'm a member of the body of Christ." In the New Testament, there are three graphic analogies of what the church is. They start with the letter 'B.' The *Body of Christ*. Also, the church is called the Bride of Christ. Jesus is the Bridegroom; we are the bride. One day

the bridegroom, Jesus, is going to come back and take us to his Father's house and we will have a great wedding celebration.

The second picture of the church is that we are a *building*. I'm not talking about a physical building with a steeple. The Bible says in 1 Peter that we are all living stones that make up the building of Christ. That's a picture of a church. When we sing in our worship services "Welcome to the house of the Lord." we're not talking about these walls and windows and pews. We're talking about this group that comprise the House of the Lord.

Finally, there is this analogy of the church being the *body*. Do you want to know how the church of the Lord Jesus Christ functions? Well, you talk about a great example of form following function, just look at your body. Don't laugh, but just look at your body. Just as you have body parts, that is the way the church is formed. Just as each part of your body has a different function, that is the way the members of the church function.

In my head there is a brain, a nerve center, and when the Bible says that Christ is the Head of the church, it doesn't mean He is the skull. It means He is the brain center. He is the nerve center of the church, and what Jesus says is just like my brain giving messages through my nerves, telling parts of the body what to do. That is how Jesus wants to function in your life and my life.

Here is a hand. A hand is for grabbing things, picking things up and it is made just for that. Aren't you glad we've got a thumb? God designed it perfectly. Look at these feet. These feet are to walk on. They are to stand on. If you all of a sudden decided you wanted to walk around on your hands all the time, can you imagine how uncomfortable and inefficient it would be to walk on your hands? Can you imagine how uncomfortable it would be to use your feet to pick up things? Some people do that, but it's just not the best use of the form and the function. We're talking about the church here. There are some feet in the body of Christ who are trying to act like a hand. And there are some hands that are trying to act like a foot. Without this arm and this elbow and this shoulder, that hand would be worthless. Without this leg and this kneecap that foot could be totally useless.

I need to give you a little teaching about the doctrine of the church. When it says "one body," there is the way the church expresses itself in two ways. Number one is the universal body of Christ. Every true believer is part of the one body. It says in Ephesians 4 there is one body. When you become a Christian, the Holy Spirit baptizes you into *the* body of Christ and when Paul writes in Ephesians 5, he says, "Husbands, love your wife as Christ loves *the* church." You say, "What church? Green Acres Baptist Church, Sylvania Baptist Church, Marvin Methodist Church? Which church?" No, it is just *the* church. It is also not only this universal body of Christ, there are local bodies of Christ. That's why Paul talks about the church's plural in Galatia or the churches plural in Asia. You see, it expresses itself both ways.

Now when it comes to this universal church, don't even worry about that because that church never meets together and it will never meet together until we're all taken up to be with Jesus and that will be the first meeting of *the* church. What you and I need to focus on is our relationship to this local body of Christ, because Jesus Christ is the head, the nerve center, of this body called Green Acres Baptist Church.

Sometimes people don't think they have to affiliate with a church. Sometimes people think they don't have to relate to a church, a local church. They say, "I'm a Christian, isn't that all that matters?" That is the main thing that matters but listen to me, and listen to me good. I don't think you can be a growing, mature Christian and be alienated or separated from a local body of believers. Sometimes people say, "Well, I love Jesus, but I don't have to go down there to that church. I can just meet in my house with my family and we can read the Bible and we can sing songs. Isn't that a church?"

I want you to think about that for a minute. Is that a church? I've had men say to me, "I don't go down to your church on Sunday morning because me and a couple of buddies, we're Christians, and we go fishing and we have our church out there on the lake." What's it called, Church of the Zebco or something like that? I've heard guys say, "I don't have to go down there to church. I play golf with three guys every Sunday morning and that is our church." And what is it, Church of the Big Bertha?

Are those things churches? Well, you need to apply these three words to every group that calls themselves a church. They all start with the letter "O."

Organization - Are they organized as a church? According to the New Testament, a church has pastors, and deacons. It has those two officers. Are the home worshipers or these guys playing golf organized as a church? If they are not, they can't call themselves a church.

Ordinances - Do they practice the ordinances of a church, meaning baptism and the Lord's Supper? Those are the two New Testament ordinances, and if these meeting in a home or on the golf course are not practicing the ordinances, they cannot call themselves a church.

Outreach - This is the one that gets most of them. Some of these groups are fellowship groups and they are not reaching out and fulfilling the Great Commission. They are not trying to bring people to Christ. You can't call yourself to church if you are so self-focused and so self-centered that you are never trying to reach out to others.

Having said all of that, listen to me. There are some meetings in homes that are churches or are going to become churches and many, many great churches started in a home, but they organized according to the Bible. They practiced the ordinances and they were so outreach oriented that they brought people in until they outgrew the house. Every believer must be affiliated with a local body of Christ because you are a member of the body of Christ.

2. I am a unique member of the Body!

I love that English word "unique." It comes from two Latin words, one meaning "uni," one, the other "equus" meaning horse. The word "unique" means "one horse." In other words, there is no other horse like you or you are the only one like it. All that means is that in the body of Christ, there is nobody else exactly like you. You say, "Wait a minute, pastor, I want to disagree with

you here. You say we are like parts of the body?" Yes. "But, I have two eyes, and if I'm an eye, isn't there another eye in the body of Christ?" Sure, but you're still not identical. You ask any ophthalmologist or optometrist and they will tell you that no two eyes are exactly the same. You say, "Well, don't I have two hands?" Sure. But friend, your hands aren't the same. One of them is dominant. Even the fingerprints aren't the same. So you may have the same gifts as other people in this body, but when you mix it in with your personality and your drive of life, you're totally different.

Have you ever heard somebody say about another individual, "When God made that person He broke the mold?" That is literally true of everybody in this room. There was one mold for you and nobody else is in that mold. My friend, you are not one in one million. You are one in 6-and-a-half billion. There is nobody else like you on the face of the planet, and there is nobody else like you in this body. You are a unique member of the body of Christ.

3. I am a dependent member of the Body!

Verse five says, "We who are many form one body and we each belong to each other." We all need each other. I need you and you need me. You see, for a long time in my ministry as pastor, I thought I had to do all of the work of the ministry. I thought I had to do everything. You know what? I was on my way to an early grave until I discovered that God had given me certain functions and gifts and he had given other people certain gifts and functions, and when I do my job and you do your job, the body of Christ moves together.

Let me ask you what would happen in your physical body if suddenly your right arm just decided it was going to stop doing anything? The head could be giving it all kinds of messages. We call that paralyze. We call that poor health. Did you know the rest of the body would be handicapped or crippled if one part of your body decided to quit doing what it was designed to do? This is a great church but do you know why this church isn't an even greater church? It is because there are many members of this body who are not following the function God has given them in this body. You are basically a spectator. You are basically a pew-warmer. You come and sit and watch and give a little bit here and there, but you are not really involved in some kind of ministry. You are like a part of the body that is paralyzed and it affects the rest of the body.

You may think your church doesn't need you. Yes, we do. We are dependent on you, every member of the body. We need you. Now, I'll grant you this, that some members of the body are more visible and prominent than others. Mike and I are up here all the time. We are like a big old nose. You can't miss it. Here we are. Some of you may be like a little toe. What is the little toe for? Well, it's to give you balance. If you had your little toe removed you will have all kinds of trouble keeping balance. Someone said, "God gave us a little toe so when we get up in the middle of the night we can find the bedpost." We learned something even about that. What happens when you stub your little toe? Do you say, "Stop hurting me. I'm just going to cut you off. I'm going to get rid of you because all you do is cause me pain." Do you do that? No. I'll tell you what you do. When you stub your little toe, even though that may be an insignificant, invisible member most of the time, all the rest of your body "boom" pays attention to it. You are really going to give it a lot of attention and try to make it feel better.

That is what makes the body of Christ an organism instead of an organization. Those of you in business have an organization and if there is a weak part of the organization, you cut it off, downsize. Friend, we don't do that in the body of Christ. When there is a hurting member, we go to try to help that member. We devote a lot of attention, a lot of effort to help a hurting member. That's why we don't cut people off. That's why I keep telling you, "Don't take folks off your Sunday School roll, even though they haven't been there in a year." Why? You are at least praying for them and giving them some attention. When they start hurting, you will be there to help them. We are a dependent member of the body. We need each other. I need you and you need me.

4. I am a gifted member of the Body!

Look at verse six. It says God has given us all gifts and next Sunday I'm going to talk all about spiritual gifts and talk about the seven that He mentions here, but a gift is not like a birthday present or something. A gift is a God-given special capacity to serve. If you don't know what God has gifted you to do you, you are going to be totally frustrated in the body of Christ. I will tell you this, one of the most liberating, energizing experiences in the Christian life is to discover what your gifts are and begin to exercise your gifts in the body of Christ.

Now could I just ask you what would happen to Green Acres Baptist Church if every member of this local body suddenly began to understand, "I am a finger. I am an elbow. I am a kneecap. I am a foot. This is my job. This is my function." And you just started doing it. You talk about a mighty moving force of God, accomplishing more than we could ever even imagine in our wildest dreams! That's the body of Christ set free to move and to grow.

I like what F.B. Meyer wrote: "It is urgently needful that the Christian people in our churches should come to understand that they are not a company of invalids to be wheeled about or fed by hand, nursed and comforted, but a garrison, a battalion, in enemy country, every one of which should have some post of duty at which he should be prepared to make any sacrifice rather than quitting." My friend, God has given you a job in Green Acres Baptist Church and if you're not doing that job, it's not getting done. You are unique; there is nobody else exactly like you. You see you have value, but the sad thing is, sometimes your value is covered up.

In 1986, when I was pastoring a church in Alabama, I really felt a burden that our church needed a camp, a church camp, so I began to pray about it and talk to some people. There was a man in our church who was gracious enough to give us money to buy 90 acres of beautiful land in Culman County, Alabama, about an hour from the church. We bought the property and some of us went up there and started tearing down an old farmhouse and some old barns. When we bought the property, we bought everything that was on the property, didn't get the mineral rights, but we got everything that was on the property. It was ours.

We got back there and we started cutting down some kudzu vines. Those of you west of the Mississippi may not know what kudzu is, but it is a very aggressive, fast-growing vine that covers everything. I thought it hadn't crossed the Mississippi but there is some out there near our

Green Acres Camp, so watch out. Kudzu is in Texas and it is going to take over. Do you know how to grow kudzu? You take a sprig of it, dig a hole in the ground, put it in the dirt, water it and run like crazy. It grows prolifically.

Anyway, we are back there in Alabama with our machetes and we were cutting down the kudzu vines and underneath them we made an amazing discovery: We found a 1957 Thunderbird coupe. It was in great shape, not just an old hulk. Somebody who previously lived on that farm parked it because there were still tires on it. It hadn't been stripped or anything. Chickens once roosted in there and birds built nests and it was a creepy place, but there it was. We said, "Wow, that is something so valuable!" We didn't have any way to get it back to Birmingham that night so the next morning we took a truck up there to bring it back. We were going to sell it and get some money to build the camp. Well, somebody else had the same idea, because we got back the next morning it was gone. Somebody just loaded it up and hauled it off.

Do you know what you do with a car like that when you find it? You restore it. Somewhere there is now a 1957 Thunderbird coupe that has been rebuilt. Restored, it is doing what it was designed and built to do, be a beautiful automobile.

God designed and built you to do something in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, but maybe through the years you've been covered up with the vines of tradition or the vines of thinking that you're not worthy or you don't have a place. You need to tear those vines away and understand that there is something valuable that God has given you, a gift. You need to be restored to the ministry that God has called you to, and when you do that, you will begin to understand why God placed you in the body and how you function. That will be the most liberating experience you will ever have in the Christian life.

Lord, I just pray that somebody will become so hungry to find their place in the body, what their job is, that they will seek your face and study your word about what spiritual gifts are and which ones they have. And oh, God, I pray that those members of the body that are paralyzed, aren't really doing anything, I pray that you bring them to the point where they realize how important they are and they begin to function in the body. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

OUTLINE

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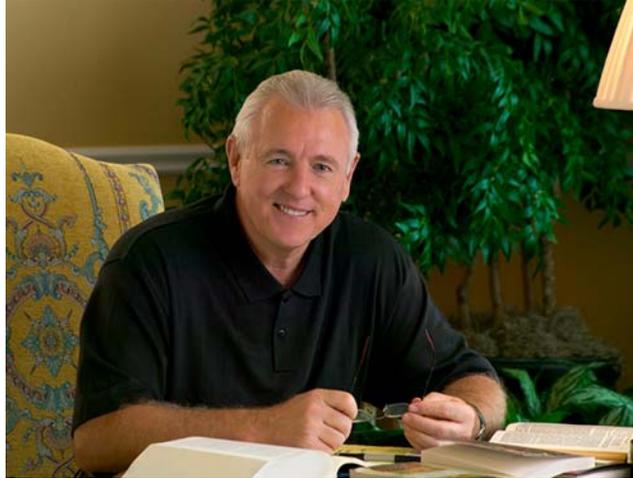
3. Proper self-esteem: Confidence without conceit

I can do everything through him who gives me strength. *Philippians 4:13*

HOW DO I FIT IN? See yourself relationally!

I am a:

1. Member of the Body of Christ!
2. Unique member of the Body!
3. Dependent member of the Body!
4. Gifted member of the Body!



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes