

# Growing in God's Love

A Story Bible Curriculum

## The Body of Christ





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🌱 **Goal:** To recognize and celebrate the connected nature of the church.

## Connecting with the Biblical Text

Comparing the way a physical body works and the importance of each body part is an excellent way to explain how the body of Christ works and the importance of each individual member of it. In this new faith community of followers of Jesus in Corinth, many opposites came together. In this house church, Jewish and Gentile disciples of Jesus met. People from rich and poor households found themselves sitting at table together. Slaves and free people praised God with one voice. All of this is prefaced in 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 with the important reminder that we are united in one baptism and the gift of the one Spirit, which binds the body of Christ together.

To dig deeper into this text, visit [bit.ly/GL1Corin12](https://bit.ly/GL1Corin12).

## Connecting with the World

By all accounts, our country is divided along many lines and finding a way to unify is critical to our future. Consider these ideas from 1 Corinthians as aids to that unity:

- 🌱 The unity of the body of Christ precludes much of the rugged individualism that is rampant in the United States. No part of the physical body or the body of Christ can go it alone. That goes for the political body too.
- 🌱 The body of Christ prompts decision making that focuses on the good of the whole body, not the good of the individual part. In recent years, the individual person, rather than the community, seems to have become the focus for decision making, even those decisions that will affect others. How might you focus on the good of all people and creation in your decisions?

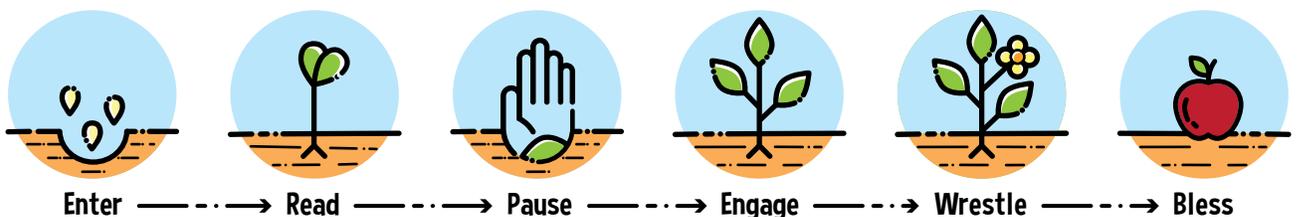
## Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Children

Young children are still discovering who they are and learning basic life skills. When they enter their first group experiences, they begin to encounter sharing, the earliest concept important to cooperation. Elementary school children are beginning to see the advantages of working together and contributing to the good of the group, whether in a classroom project or on a sports team. They soon discover the importance of each member doing their best and doing their part. They will understand this notion of the physical body and each part being necessary and important as outlined in the story. However, take care about your language of the necessity of each part, because some members of our community have physical impairments but are still whole people. Not everybody's eyes see or ears hear, for example.

## Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Adults

- 🌱 You are an important member of the body of Christ. This message is as important for adults to hear as it is for children. Your gifts are as necessary for the community as anyone's. Where is your contribution most needed?
- 🌱 What gifts do you have that can contribute to the good of the community, whether the civic community or the community of faith? Some are named in verse 29, but not all of them. Begin by trying on for size those named in the passage.
- 🌱 Look around you. Where do you see the idea of working together for the common good? Where is it needed? How might you promote it?

*Holy God, may we discover and use our gifts faithfully in this community of faith. Amen.*



## Gathering Supplies

Based on your choices, you will need:

- ✓ *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*
- ✓ Battery-operated candle
- ✓ Drawing supplies
- ✓ Mural paper
- ✓ Copies of Resource Page 1
- ✓ *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal* (or another hymnal)
- ✓ Internet-connected device

## Preparing to Lead

Read the passage 1 Corinthians 12:12–31, from the Bible, and think about how the image of the church as a body reflects who may be in your group. Reread the passage slowly. As you read the second time, make notes of any questions it raises for you. Then read the story “One Church” in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* (p. 306).

Consider how you engage with the passage:

- ✓ How does the simplified language in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* enhance your understanding of the passage?
- ✓ What role do you see yourself serving in the body of Christ?
- ✓ What does it mean to you when Paul says in verse 23, “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”?
- ✓ Does this image of the church as a body contrast with how our culture sees itself? If so, how?

Recall the names and faces of the children you will teach. What do you know about them? Pray for them, and as you pray, give thanks for that which makes them unique. Think about the church community that you are part of and lift the whole body in prayer, giving thanks for the gifts that members of the body share together.

Paul uses the image of a body to describe the church. This image is effective in communicating the interconnectedness of the church and is easily understood by people of all ages. As you lead this session, be sure to remain attentive to the differing abilities of the children (and their loved ones). Not everyone has use of their eyes or ears. The purpose of the image is not that every part needs to be present

or in perfect condition but rather that the body works together in unity.

Research any partnerships your congregation has with churches and/or church workers in different countries so that you can tell the children about them in “Grow with More.” See if you can set up a video call with a church partner during your session time.



## Enter into sacred space together.

Invite the children to gather in the seating area.

Go around the circle and greet each child, welcoming them individually into the space. If you know every child's name, greet them by name. Otherwise, you can ask them their name and welcome them into the space. Turn on the candle.

Lead the children in the following prayer, inviting them to repeat the words and motions after you:

God of the heavens, (*stretch arms upward*) /  
God of the earth, (*stretch arms outward*) /  
God of our hearts, (*cross arms across the chest in a hug*) /  
God all around us, (*bring chin to chest and move head in a circular motion, returning with chin to chest*) /  
we are your body. (*look to the left and slowly look to the right, stretching the neck*) /  
We are your hands. (*stretch arms forward*) /  
We are your feet. (*touch your toes*) /  
Amen. (*return to seated position*) /



## Read a story of God's people.

Invite the children to listen to a letter from Paul to a church in Corinth. Before beginning the story, invite the children to take a moment to think about various people they know in the church. Encourage them to wonder to themselves:

- ✓ What does that person do at church?
- ✓ How do I know this person?
- ✓ What is something I know about this person?

Explain that this story is about all the people who make up the church. Suggest to the children that they wonder about how the people they thought about are also part of this story as you read.

## Leading

Read the story “One Church” from *Growing in God’s Love: A Story Bible* (p. 306).



### Pause to let God’s Word enter into hearts and minds.

Encourage the children to lie on their backs or sit in a comfortable position. Turn off most of the lights in the room and explain that you will watch the clock for one minute. Encourage the children to pay attention to their body during that time. Remind them that their body is made of many parts, and in the time of silence, they should focus in turn on their hands, arms, legs, feet, breath, heartbeat, neck, mouth, or any other part of the body that they notice. After a minute has passed, invite the children to rejoin the circle.



### Engage curiosity and imagination with God’s story.

Engage with the children about the story by wondering together about the following questions:

- ✦ Why do you think people were arguing about who was the best follower of Jesus?
  - ✦ How do you think the people in Corinth felt when they received Paul’s letter?
  - ✦ Why do you think Paul used the body to describe how the church should work?
  - ✦ What part of the body do you think Paul thought he was?
  - ✦ The story says “After Pentecost, the church began to spread beyond Jerusalem.” Do you think that made things easier or harder for the church to get along? Why?
- Building a Body
- ✦ Paul knew that each part of the body was important and that the body could not function as well without all the parts of the body. Explain to the children that they are going to draw a body together.
  - ✦ Help the children roll out the mural paper, and invite a volunteer who is willing to be traced to lie down on the paper. Trace the volunteer’s body on the sheet of paper.
  - ✦ Have the children find their own place in the meeting space where they can draw without others seeing their work, and give them each four pieces of paper. Instruct them to draw four

different body parts. Encourage them to think creatively about all the different possibilities: foot, eye, ear, kneecap, belly button, elbow, armpit, and so on. When they are done, have them cut out the body parts.

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Younger children may have difficulty cutting. If this is the case, you may either help them do the cutting or invite an older child to help them. As usual, emphasize that participation, not perfection, is the goal.

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- ✦ After everyone is done with their drawing and cutting, invite them to tape their parts on the outline of the body. After the body is assembled, ask the children about the body they created:
  - How do you think this body would work in real life? What would it be able to do? What would it not be able to do?
  - What was hard about this exercise?
  - How did you decide what body parts to draw? How did you decide where to put them?
- ✦ Repeat the exercise, but this time inform the children that they can work together. Give them new pieces of paper and three minutes to plan which parts they want to draw and use. When they are finished, engage with them in a conversation about this exercise:
  - How do you think this body would work in real life? What would it be able to do? What would it not be able to do?
  - How was this experience different from the first time you built the body?
  - How did you decide which body parts to draw this time? How did the ability to work together affect the choices you made?
  - How do you think this exercise relates to Paul’s Letter to the Corinthians?



### Wrestle with our place in God’s story.

When Paul wrote his letter to the church in Corinth, the church was spreading around the world. In the first part of the session, you explored how important it is for the body to work together in order to work well. In this part of the session, you will explore how the children are connected and vital members of the body of Christ around the world.

## Leading

Choose one or both options:

- Being the Body of Christ
  - ✦ Give each child a copy of Resource Page 1. Help them work through the page, identifying gifts and abilities they have. Try to help each child identify one characteristic, gift, or ability that is uniquely theirs. Have the children cut out the various gift boxes when they have been filled in.
  - ✦ Lay out the gift boxes, mixed up, in front of the children so that all gifts are visible. Then lead the children in identifying combinations of the gifts that can be used to support the church or serve other people or creation.
  - ✦ Mix and match all kind of gifts, and be as creative as you can. Think of all the many tasks that keep a congregation running and of the varied community needs and ways to meet them!

Be sure to identify and use at least one gift each child has presented during this activity. Nobody is left out in the body of Christ—everyone has something to contribute. If necessary, name for the child the gifts and abilities you see in them.

- ✦ Celebrate the gifts represented by your group and affirm their place in the body of Christ.
- The Global Body
  - ✦ Explain to the children that Paul wrote his Letter to the Corinthians early in the church's life. The body of Christ was expanding in a big way throughout the ancient world! As the church grew, it gained new members with different cultures, practices, and habits.
  - ✦ Explore the diversity of the body of Christ by singing or listening to global hymns together. Choose one or more of the following hymns from *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal*, or another hymnal, or show the corresponding YouTube videos.
    - “Come All You People / (Uyai Mose)” (*GtG*, #388, [bit.ly/GLComeAll](https://bit.ly/GLComeAll), 2:01)—Zimbabwe
    - “This Is the Day / (Est es el dia)” (*GtG*, #391, [bit.ly/GLArgentina](https://bit.ly/GLArgentina), 2:00)—Argentina
    - “What Is This Place” (*GtG*, #404, [bit.ly/GLNetherlands](https://bit.ly/GLNetherlands), 2:06)—Netherlands
    - “As the Wind Song / (風之頌)” (*GtG*, #292, [bit.ly/GLWindSong](https://bit.ly/GLWindSong), 3:15)—Singapore & New Zealand
    - “There’s a Sweet, Sweet Spirit” (*GtG*, #408, [bit.ly/GLSweetSpirit](https://bit.ly/GLSweetSpirit), 2:19)—United States

- “God Is Calling through the Whisper” (*GtG*, #410, [bit.ly/GLGodIsCalling](https://bit.ly/GLGodIsCalling), 2:07)—Poland
- “Hallelujah! We Sing Your Praises / (Haleluya! Pelo tsa rona)” (*GtG*, #538, [bit.ly/GLSAfrica](https://bit.ly/GLSAfrica), 3:45)—South Africa
- “Bless the Lord” (*GtG*, #544, [bit.ly/GLBlessLord](https://bit.ly/GLBlessLord), 4:26)—France
- “Come Now, O Prince of Peace / (오소서)” (*GtG*, #103, [bit.ly/GLPrincePeace](https://bit.ly/GLPrincePeace), 1:59)—Korea
- “The Lord Now Sends Us Forth / (Enviado soy de Dios)” (*GtG*, #747, [bit.ly/GLSendsForth](https://bit.ly/GLSendsForth), 2:58)—Cuba
- ✦ Engage in conversation with the children around what you heard using the following prompts:
  - What do the different languages and songs show about the body of Christ?
  - What do the songs have in common? What is different?
  - How can we connect with these members of the body of Christ around the world?



### Bless one another with God's grace.

Select one of the sending hymns from the previous activity. Sing the song or say the words together, or have the children repeat each line after you. After the song concludes, look around the circle and send them off with Paul's words: “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Corinthians 12:27).



### Grow with more.

- Connecting with the Body
  - ✦ Tell the children about any partnerships your congregation has with churches and/or church workers in different countries. Ask the children what they know about that country. Invite them to do some internet research on your denominational website about the country and/or mission co-worker partnered with your church.
  - ✦ If you were able to set up a video call, brainstorm some questions the children could ask. Wonder how this partnership builds up the body of Christ and what can be accomplished together that couldn't be done apart.

