

Columbia, Missouri
The Worship of God • January 23, 2022



The Scripture
1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says “Let Jesus be cursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

The Message
“What Is STRONG with Me? – Mind”
Mark Briley

If reading digitally, click on this link, or if reading from a printed copy, it will be very helpful if you find this link address shared on the next page.

What's Strong with Me? Commercial – Fitbit. 2021.

https://www.google.com/search?q=what+is+strong+with+me+commercial&rlz=1C1CHBF_enUS882US882&oq=what+is+strong+with+me+commercial&aqs=chrome..69i57j0i22i30.3105j0j15&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#kpvalbx=D4LtYZaVJIWwqtsPy8eTsAg18

Are you feeling strong these days? Are you discovering what is strong with you in this New Year? This commercial from Fitbit inspired our current series to begin the new year. And it *is* a progression. The questions at the beginning are not all that confident. The “*What is strong with me?*” offered by those in the beginning of the commercial has an uncertain tone as if to say, “*I don’t know what is strong with me.*” But as it progresses, as each person puts in the work, participates in the transformation they seek, their confidence grows. They begin to believe what is strong with them.

I hope you are, too. We opened the series with a strong **WORD** – tied to our Star Word Sunday where we invited you to draw your own unique and guiding word for the year – and that is off and running well. Still cards left if you’d like one. Just grab one after worship or shoot us a message at the office, and we’ll mail you one.

Last week we considered what **COMMITMENTS** are strong with me, with you, with us as we considered the baptism of Jesus and why that was so important to him. If you missed either or both of those messages, you can find them on our YouTube channel if you want something to engage while you’re driving to work, exercising, or otherwise.

Stay connected. Stay engaged. That not only makes you stronger, but it makes your community stronger as well. That’s where we’re shifting today as we consider “*What is strong with me?*” today: What is strong with your **MIND**. Our angle with the MIND may not be exactly what you expect today. We may first think of mental toughness. If my mind is going to be what is strong with me, then it should be mentally tough.

There’s something to this, right? I have a friend, who says he mentally whips everything. It’s become a bit of way we good-nature-rib each other now because we know some things are beyond our ability to mentally whip. But mental fortitude is important. “*You can do anything you put your mind to,*” we say. “*Mind over matter,*” we say. Yogi Berra used to say that “*Baseball is 90% mental and the other half is physical.*” Does that add up? 😊

My wife would run marathons. She put in the physical training necessary to accomplish her goals successfully, but she would always say that it was the mental strength that would kick into high gear when the body was suggesting it was uncertain about these 26.2 miles. We understand this.

We talk about “*getting in our own heads*” as problematic. Anne Lamott would always say, “*My mind is like a bad neighborhood – you never want to go in there by yourself.*”

Or the rapper Scarface who knew the head games we play saying, “*Can’t keep a steady hand because I’m nervous. Every Sunday morning I’m in service. Praying for forgiveness and trying to find an exit out the business. I know the Lord is looking at me, but still it’s hard for me to feel happy.*” Why? He says, “*My mind’s playing tricks on me.*”

We understand this, too. We’re ambushed with headlines intended to capture and control our minds. I walked into a building this week that had a bank of televisions playing different news stations. President Biden was offering a word live on the occasion of his first anniversary of being in the office. And here’s the thing. I don’t even have to tell you which news channel it was but can simply tell you the headline of each one and you’ll know.

The headline of the first: “*President Biden Holds News Conference Marking First Year in Office.*”

The headline of the second: “*Biden faces off with Media as Crises Mount.*”

Are either wrong? Well. What we know is that both push an agenda. And without the volume on... without being able to hear even a single word the president was saying, my mind went to two different places based on the headline alone.

Your mind is processing sensory stimuli constantly, even if presented for as little as 50 milliseconds (*or 1/20th of a second*). You’re processing, processing, processing. Some say our brains can respond to information that’s even much briefer than 1/20th of a second. And it’s fascinating, isn’t it?

Your mind is churning right now. Some of the headlines going across the ticker of your foreheads right now are, “*What is God trying to speak to me today?*” “*Did Briley really just drop a Geto Boys reference?*” “*I’m not sure I believe enough today.*” “*Did I unplug my curling iron?*” “*I miss her so much.*” “*How am I going to forgive him?*” “*What’s the square root of 4,278?*” (65.4+).

I don’t know what some of you think about. What is strong with your mind? Make space for quiet reflection, download a mindfulness app, feed your brain with positive things, and strengthen your individual mind. All is good for you and me and therefore ultimately good for all of us together. And that’s where we’re headed with a strong mind today – perhaps what some are calling the extended mind. What is that?

Scientific writer, Annie Murphy Paul, has written a book called *The Extended Mind: The Power of Thinking Outside the Brain*.¹ She challenges us to tap into the intelligence that exists beyond our brains – in our bodies, in our surroundings and in our relationships. She’s studied how this is demonstrated in little things like walking or exercising together and how that leads us to behave more cooperatively and ultimately more successfully when it comes to achieving shared goals. Morning calisthenics routines are broadcast over Japanese radio, and they are followed by people ranging from Sony executives to public-school children in hopes of creating greater synergy and cohesion as a people. It’s why families have often had goals of sharing the evening meal together at the same table – it’s not about the food – (*well... it’s a little about the food but...*) it’s about the synergy and connection. It’s why the Church has long come together to worship and serve.

It matters that we’re here, together, extending our minds to the wider inclusion of the group. Murphy Paul says our thinking is also helped by taking what she calls an “awe walk,” getting out of our homes or the office and spending time outdoors. Just look around and be curious, be awed, which helps act as a “reset button” for the human brain, shaking us loose from old patterns and opening us to new ways of thinking. Get those steps in and practice awe.

Psychologist Emily Balcetis studied this work and says that, “*Intelligence can be found, in part, in our brains, but perhaps even more importantly in our hearts and skin,*” [like the octopus that holds two-thirds of their cognition in their arms]. And this extends beyond our own bodies, Balcetis says, It’s “*in the architecture of the physical spaces we surround ourselves with and in the friendships we keep.*” This form of intelligence “*isn’t found in just one person but emerges as multiple minds collaborate.*” She calls it “*socially distributed cognition.*”² Socially-distributed thinking. Not one brain, but an extended mind. Interesting.

The Apostle Paul seems to tap into something of this understanding as we explore his first letter to the church at Corinth – a church he had started and served for about 18 months before he moved on to start another church elsewhere.³

When people become Christians, they don’t, at the same moment, become nice. That’s maybe a funny way to say, it but we get the idea. Who we were coming into this transformative connection to faith in Jesus, is still all up in our business. It’s just like those New Year’s resolutions to shed the holiday weight – we want it to all happen the

¹ Annie Murphy Paul. *The Extended Mind: The Power of Thinking Outside the Brain*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing. 2022

² Balcetis, Emily. “Where does great thinking come from? Look beyond the brain.” *The Washington Post*, June 18, 2021, www.washingtonpost.com,

³ Background on Corinth church and community as shared in Eugene Peterson’s introduction to Paul’s letter in The Message translation of the Bible.

first day. It takes time. It's why we mentioned last week, coming up with new year's **routines** may be more productive than simply naming new year's **resolutions**.

Corinth had a reputation in the ancient world of being a party people; known for their sexual promiscuity, hard-drinking, and what those from outside of Corinth might call unruly. Just giving you a flavor of the community. But Paul was a determined guy and in he goes to share the Gospel he's come to know in Jesus. If anyone knows transformation is possible, it's Paul. He did a hard 180 in his own life. He's not only the president of the hair club, but also a client, right? So, he goes in, probably starts a worship service in the local tavern and gets a few key influencers in the community to join a Theology on Tap study group. Remember, Paul is the *"become all things to all people that I might win some,"* theologian. And so, we have this letter preserved for all of history and for our learning today. It's a response to a text message or ZOOM call with some of the church leaders left in charge of the church after Paul parted. They're having a hard time keeping the team together. Things are getting wonky. Practices a little suspect. Theology a little flighty. And so, they come at Paul with a list of things they seek some clarity and insight on.

Paul opens his letter gracefully and with love for these people he's walked with to start the church. *"You all are awesome,"* he says. *"You've come a long way."* *"Some good and wise people."* *"I miss you. I ain't mad at ya. I got nothin' but love for ya."*

Nice warm and fuzzy intro. But then he gets right after it. *"I have a serious concern to bring up with you, my friends. I'll put it as urgently as I can: You must get along with each other. You must learn to be considerate of one another, cultivating a life in common."* And then he throws his contact under the bus a bit. *"Got a text from Chloe saying the church is a hot mess right now."*

Can't you see this letter being read out loud at the board meeting, and Chloe just sinks down a little lower and lower in the seat. But they keep reading and we find Paul saying, *"Pull it together. You need each other. And you're just distracting yourselves from your purpose. You're running down theological rabbit holes that aren't central to your purpose and doing unnecessary surveys about which preacher you like better. You've pulled your eyes off Christ, and now it's a free-for-all. Pull it together and move forward as a team."*

It's the sentiment Rev. Steven Charleston offers about the Christian Church today: *"Celebrating what we hope for together is better than fighting over what we believe separately."*

Paul goes on to use some variation of the phrase over and over, “*Now concerning this...*” “*Now... about that...*” as he answers Chloe’s concerns with the community. And that gets us to our text for today. “*Now concerning spiritual gifts...*”

Think of this as the extended mind. “*You don’t all have the same gifts,*” he says. The Spirit was not coming to them as isolated individuals but as a community. The Spirit was offering them spiritually distributed cognition – an extended mind. And he says specifically, the strength of your gift of the Spirit... “*is for the common good.*”

One Body with an extended mind for the common good. What’s your spiritual gift? Do you know? And aren’t you glad we don’t all have the same one? I think about our staff team – gifted and geared in many different beautifully unique ways; everyone with their own unique background and experience. It deepens and enriches our ministry. And one mind, extended, becomes much stronger – but that strength only comes when you bring your mind to the table and open it. You bring what is strong with you and respect what is strong in the other. We need financial minds and compassionate minds; outreaching minds and contemplative, in-reaching minds.

I heard it described recently that when it comes to church or faith or religion, people tend to land in one of three dominant camps: *Right belief. Right Experience. or... Right Action.* Our right belief-ers among us are seeking a well-argued doctrine. The quest for Truth is more compelling for them than experiencing the Spirit or serving the community. Our right-experience folks seek Spirit-infused worship and places to capture all the feels. They trust the swell and experience of the Spirit as the primary importance to the faith. Our right-action agents among us are looking for a little less talk and a lot more justice-oriented action. Hands and feet of Christ is their measurement of faith.

And you know what I’ve found? Depending on how hard core centered you are in any of those camps determines how much you’re interested in having anything to do with the other two. But when we let our extended minds get a broader perspective, we’re much stronger when these three are represented and spread among us as a church. Instead of getting frustrated with each other when you think the whole of us should be concerned with the things that are primary on your mind, find the beauty and strength of this extended mind that is not lopsided but studying and talking faith, praying, and feeling the Spirit, and getting out there in the world to feed and shelter our neighbors. This is a strong mind. And Paul knew it.

There are no lone geniuses. The best work collaboratively and expand their understanding by the day. When Paul lived in Corinth, he lived with a couple named Aquila and Priscilla. They worked together as tentmakers. Can you imagine the conversations they had over their tent-sewing operation as they worked out their faith

day by day? Paul had numerous traveling companions including Timothy. Paul loved having Timothy join him because he was a young man of a different generation who could broaden his thinking and... Tim's mom was Jewish, and his dad was Greek, so Timothy could relate to both communities that Paul was ministering to. And we learn in Acts that after Timmy joined the effort, "*the churches were strengthened in faith and increased in numbers daily.*"

Extended Christian mind. Was Paul mentally tough? I'd have to think he was, and we know that is a strong characteristic of strong leaders. But it's the extended mind that was strongest with Paul. He could've set up shop and stayed forever and created a cult following of his own in Corinth, but he shared the gifts, he grew the minds of others, and his mind was strengthened by them, too. Don't isolate yourself. *Connect. Listen. Discern. Grow.* That's a pattern that can be strong with any of us.

Can we do this together? Can your mind expand, extend – flow through even your body, your relationships, and even the Body of Christ? I believe now is the time for us to discover what we're really made of. We find ourselves in year three of Crisis Leadership. It's grueling and exhausting at times but such times also tend to be the times we grow the most.

So, I leave you with a "*New Day's Lyric*,⁴" a word from Poet Laureate, Amanda Gorman, who offers this word in this time. May it be our prayer...

May this be the day
We come together.
Mourning, we come to mend,
Withered, we come to weather,
Torn, we come to tend,
Battered, we come to better.
Tethered by this year of yearning,
We are learning
That though we weren't ready for this,
We have been readied by it.
Steadily we vow that no matter
How we are weighed down,
We must always pave a way forward.
This hope is our door, our portal.
Even if we never get back to normal,
Someday we can venture beyond it,
To leave the known and take the first steps.

⁴ <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/amanda-gorman-writes-end-of-year-poem-new-days-lyric>

So let us not return to what was normal,
But reach toward what is next.
What was cursed, we will cure.
What was plagued, we will prove pure.
Where we tend to argue, we will try to agree,
Those fortunes we forswore, now the future we foresee,
Where we weren't aware, we're now awake.
Those moments we missed
Are now these moments we make,
The moments we meet,
And our hearts, once all together beaten,
Now all together beat.
Come, look up with kindness yet,
For even solace can be sourced from sorrow.
We remember, not just for the sake of yesterday,
But to take on tomorrow.
We heed this old spirit,
In a new day's lyric,
In our hearts, we hear it:
For auld lang syne, my dear,
For auld lang syne.
Be bold, sang Time this year,
Be bold, sang Time,
For when you honor yesterday,
Tomorrow ye will find.
Know what we've fought
Need not be forgot nor for none.
It defines us, binds us as one,
Come over, join this day just begun.
For wherever we come together,
We will forever overcome.

May it be so.

Song of Focus
"Together"

Words and Music: Ed Varnum

I am more; you are more when we are together.
Bring your gifts; I'll bring mine; together we are strong!
As we dream, as we dream, the end is always better,
like harmony brings fullness to a song.

Holy Spirit of God, move among us and within.

Guide and inspire ever on to greater things!

Holy Spirit of God, move among us and within.

I am more; you are more when we are together.

Bring your gifts; I'll bring mine; together we are strong!

As we dream, as we dream, the end is always better,

like harmony brings fullness to a song.

BROAD HEARTS BROAD MINDS BROAD REACH