

# THE INCREDIBLES

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## The Body Principle

Text: 1 Corinthians 12:7-27

### Introduction to the Scripture Reading

As we saw last week, every great family is founded FIRST and foremost on the *Covenant Principle*, on a radical commitment to one another, inspired by the stunning example of God's own commitment to us. The first Christian family just could not get over the way God kept his side of the covenant. Their lives were continually being reshaped by the knowledge that even though they had slept through Jesus' hour of need, Jesus did not fail them. **"I will be with you always,"** said Jesus,<sup>1</sup> even when you call me at midnight, even where it means bearing a cross.

**"If I go up to the heavens, you are there"** King David once marveled in the face of God's faithfulness to him. **"If I make my bed in the depths, you are there [God]. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast."**<sup>2</sup> For you have said, O God: **"Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you."**<sup>3</sup>

Wherever a circle of people looks deeply into the never-sleeping, cross-embracing commitment God makes to us and resolves to live toward that kind of commitment to others too, there can begin there the growth of a truly great family. It happened with the first Christian family. It can happen with yours and mine. Are we willing to make that kind of covenant with the people God has given us? If so, then there is a SECOND important principle for family life that can bring that commitment to life. It is the one which I'll call the *Body Principle* and it is expressed in the words the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians chapter 12.

### Great Families See Themselves As a Unit

**"The body is a unit,"** writes Paul, **"though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ"** – that is, with all of us who live under Christ's influence. **"For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body"** Paul continues, **"whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free -- we were all given the one Spirit to drink."** It gets harder and harder to think of our family life in these terms. The world continually calls us to see our lives individualistically. Somebody asks me "How are you doing?" or "Where are you going?" and instead of reflecting on the condition of my whole family unit I'm tempted to reflect primarily on my health, my to-do list, my mood. I think easily of my schedule, my achievements, my iPod, my car, my sports, my spiritual life, my ambitions and needs. That's why it's almost shocking to meet someone who looks at life very differently.

In his book, *Rumors of Another World*, Philip Yancey describes a visit Jesse Jackson made to the University of Southern Mississippi. "While touring the campus with the

university president, [Jackson] noticed a towering male student, six-feet, eight-inches tall, holding hands with a midget coed barely three-feet tall. His curiosity piqued, Jackson stopped to watch as the young man, dressed in a warm-up suit, tenderly picked up the [small person], kissed her, and sent her off to class. The president explained that the student was a star basketball player. Both parents had died in his youth, and he made a vow to look after his sister. Many scholarship offers came his way, but only Southern Mississippi offered one to his sister too. Jackson went over to the basketball star, introduced himself, and said he [admired] him looking out for his sister. The athlete shrugged and said, 'Those of us who God makes 6' 8" have to look out for those he makes 3' 3".'<sup>4</sup>

How do you teach and model this kind of vision in your family? Do we make spending decisions based on what is best for the whole unit? Do we set our personal schedules based on what most benefits the whole Body? Do we celebrate the sacrifices someone makes for the sake of the family? Do we point at the bad choices people make, not only in terms of what it feels like to me as a parent, child, or spouse, but in terms of what it does to the whole family unit? When changes you don't like are made in your family at home or church or work, do you look past your personal preferences and ask: "How might these changes benefit the larger circle?"

This way of seeing doesn't just make for better family life at home. It equips every member with part of the vision needed for the transformation of the larger communities of our workplace, society, and world. The great 18<sup>th</sup> century scientist, J.B. Priestley, once wrote: "We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other. And the time will soon come when, if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish."<sup>5</sup> It takes a leap of consciousness to think that one of the most profound things we can do in the war on terror, or the struggle for racial reconciliation or even the renewal of our global environment, is to teach our children to think of their choices in terms of the welfare of the whole family. But if they truly learn to do this at home, think how this vision may play out as they move through the world.

### **Great Families Value Individual Gifts**

Great Families see themselves and seek to live as a unit, because, as Paul says, we are all members of a Body and the **"body is a unit."** We get strong or sick, we win or lose, we rise or fall together. But great families also remember to keep valuing the unique importance of each individual in that Body. **"Now the body is not made up of one part but of many,"** wrote St. Paul. **"If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be... If they were all one part, where would the body be?"**

One of my favorite family films of recent years is Disney Pixar's movie, *The Incredibles*. For those who haven't seen it, it is the story of an apparently ordinary suburban family named Parr, caught up in all the routine drudgery and conflicts that mark most of our

lives. When a mysterious call comes, however, Bob Parr is suddenly drawn back into a world he had left fifteen years ago when the Superhero Relocation Project diverted him from his previous career of “saving lives and battling evil on a daily basis.” Big-bellied Bob not only finds that he still has more heroism in him than he knew, he discovers that his wife and children also do. Helen is, in reality “Elastigirl.” Daughter Violet has this amazing force field power. Son, Dash, has lightning speed, and even baby Jack-Jack has a power you’ll just have to rent the film to see! The revelation that comes to all in the family is that every one of them has been amazingly gifted and that when they pool their gifts together, they can accomplish things that are simply “Incredible.”

The Body of Christ, and the families that are part of it, are like this, says St. Paul: **“To each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good... All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and [God] gives them to each one, just as he determines.”** The question I want to ask is: Do the people in your family recognize this? Do the members of your family body know what their gifts are and what these gifts are for?

Here in **1 Corinthians 12**, the Apostle Paul names gifts of wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, discernment, ecstatic worship, administration, and others. In **Ephesians 4:11**, he mentions the gift of shepherding, teaching, and several more. In **Romans 12:6-8**, he lists the gift of leading, of giving, of encouraging, or of showing mercy. In **Romans 12:13**, the Apostle mentions the gift of hospitality and in **1 Corinthians 13** the gift of love. In providing these lists, Paul isn’t giving us an exhaustive catalogue, so much as trying to show us that God has endowed his people with a stunning wealth and variety of capacities for building up the Body.

I see that in my own family. My wife Amy is a gifted in so many ways, but one is the gift for creating beauty. She can take a couple of ordinary objects, a splash of just the right colors, and arrange them all in such a way that people stop and stare. A former computer sales rep, today she’s studying interior design with a dream of using her gifts, in part, to help return simple beauty to the lives of natural disaster victims.

My son, Rush, has the gift of compassion. From the time he was three, teacher after teacher has commented on it. He has this way of spotting when someone is hurting or left out and a heart that reaches out. Son, Cole, is a natural comedian. He has laughter that warms a cold day, and a wit that keeps us all rolling when we’ve been tempted to take ourselves or our problems too seriously. Our youngest, Reed, is an artist like his mom. Not a day goes by that he doesn’t present someone in the family with some beautiful thing he has created for them. It’s incredible.

### **Three Ways to Breakdown or Build-up**

It has been my experience that family pain often proceeds from one of three breakdowns in an understanding of the nature of the Body, and the Apostle Paul cites all three of them. Sometimes the hurt comes because one family member doesn’t recognize his or her gifts, only the gifts of others. Does that ever happen in your home?

Are there ever insecurities and jealousies there? How can we teach one another what the Bible does -- that **“if the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?”** Don't you see that **“in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be”**?

Sometimes pain in families comes because someone in the family doesn't recognize the importance of others' gifts. I'm the one that makes this family go. I'm doing everything around here. Why don't you people do things the way I do? But **“the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don't need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don't need you!’”** There is almost no family I've ever met who, when one of their members suddenly dies, does not immediately mourn the fact that they didn't see clearly enough or name often enough the staggering and irreplaceable contributions that person made to the family. Why do we wait?

The third breakdown comes because sometimes a family doesn't encourage everyone to use their gifts. One of the most devastating social changes of the last 50 years has been the shift in how parents understand the strategy for blessing their children. Parents today pick up after their kids, drive them everywhere, shower rewards without labor in a way that mystifies the great generations that came before them. In an earlier era, parents understood that preparing their children for life meant requiring them to do chores, to take on responsibilities, to employ their gifts in service to others even at a relatively young age. In the words of St. Paul in Ephesians 4:12-13, they understood that one of the primary roles of parents were: **“to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all... become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”**

How is this vision God gives us working out in your family and mine? One of my favorite scenes in the movie *The Incredibles* depicts Bob Parr parking his car as a little neighbor boy watches him. Parr says, “What are you waiting for?” The little boy says, “Something amazing I guess.” Bob Parr responds, “Me too kid.” What are you and others in your family waiting for? Do you look around at one another and see not a collection of individuals, but instead a body, a living unit? Do you recognize your own gifts? Do you celebrate others gifts? Do you work to make sure that everyone's gifts are actively employed? What would it take for that to happen? Only you can say for sure, but I know what the result would be: It would be something amazing, something absolutely *incredible*.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 28:20

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 139:8-10

<sup>3</sup> Deuteronomy 31:6-8; Hebrews 13:5

<sup>4</sup> Philip Yancey, *Rumors of Another World* (Zondervan, 2003), p. 204

<sup>5</sup> *Men of Integrity*, Vol. 1, no. 1.