

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

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THROUGHOUT THIS BOOK, Dr. Paul Brand and Philip Yancey invite us to “pause and wonder at what God made: the human body.” We offer this guide as a challenge to go even further. Within a discussion group, with a reading partner, or even as an individual, you can use these questions to increase mindfulness about the Body of Christ. The set of questions after each section will prompt deeper thought and reflection, and also suggest opportunities for action.

The Hebrew word translated “fearfully” calls to mind reverence and respect. It is our desire that this book and the ensuing discussion will prepare you to better recognize, revere, and reflect on God’s presence in the world—in your body and in *the Body*. As Philip Yancey states in the preface, Dr. Brand provided him the “assurance that the Christian life I had heard in theory can actually work out in practice.” In your hands, this assurance continues.

### PART ONE: IMAGE BEARERS (CHAPTERS 1–2)

1. God creates each of us with a physical body, which Dr. Brand describes as a community made up of individual cells. In the same way that our individual healthy cells work together for the good of the physical body, we each have specific abilities that contribute to the overall Body of Christ.

Take an honest look at your role in this community. Share examples of how you have served as a loyal member of the Body, supporting the needs of others.

## 2. Read Psalm 139:13-16:

For you created my inmost being;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
your works are wonderful,  
I know that full well.  
My frame was not hidden from you  
when I was made in the secret place,  
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.  
Your eyes saw my unformed body;  
all the days ordained for me were written in your book  
before one of them came to be.

You are an intention of God, who designed and knew you before you entered the world. Talk about your experience of being *known*; describe what this looks like in a few specific settings or relationships, such as your family or church or perhaps a sports team.

How does this compare with times when you feel unnoticed or insignificant?

Thinking of your own experience, how can you make a difference in the lives of others, offering a greater sense of value and significance?

3. Dr. Brand reacted with a start when one of his interns unwittingly conveyed a likeness of Brand's former professor, who the student had never met. We also function as a link in this human chain, passing along expressions, gestures, and other unique manifestations of our character. Do you have a similar story of observing someone's imprint among those in your community?

Consider 2 Corinthians 3:18: "We all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." If you could choose, what characteristic of God would you most want to pass along to family, friends, or close coworkers?

How have you seen evidence of the likeness of God in others?

4. Discuss the Quasimodo effect. How have you encountered the stereotype of equating ugly with bad, and beautiful with good?

Examine your own story—when have you judged and labeled people because of external appearances?

What do you find most difficult about trying to look past the outer shell in order to see the true person inside?

5. Consider this quote from Peter Foster, the RAF pilot whose face was disfigured from burns: “As you prepare to enter the world with your new face, only one thing matters: how your family and intimate friends will respond.” Share a story to illustrate how the gaze or opinion of someone else has affected you or defined you.

Does your own physical self-image influence what you believe is true about God’s image of you?

Use this self-reflection to become more aware of how others may struggle with this. We are God’s reflection in the world, and we have the opportunity to become the mirror for those we encounter. List a few specific acts of affirmation you can employ to demonstrate God’s acceptance and love.

6. Dr. Brand maintains that love requires direct contact, often involving physical touch. God did not remain distant but rather came alongside us in the person of Jesus, who then entrusted his followers with the mission of conveying the good news of God’s presence to a needy world. Spend some time considering who you can come alongside—at work, in the neighborhood, at church. Address honestly what might be keeping you from these actions.

*Reflect:* “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Corinthians 12:27). The human body contains around thirty-five trillion cells, an amount five thousand times greater than the number of people on our planet. Respond in prayer to God, reflecting on what you have learned, and how you have been challenged regarding your role in the Body.

## PART TWO: ONE AND MANY (CHAPTERS 3–6)

1. The cells in our bodies display an amazing array of specialization, with unique tasks allocated to specific cells. For specialization to work, the

individual cell must forgo all but one or two of its abilities. Let's apply this concept to the Body of Christ. What do you recognize as your own potential area of specialization?

Jesus cautioned his followers to “count the cost” when accepting his invitation to serve others. What is the possible cost of focusing on your specialized service to the Body of Christ (or the cost of a role you are considering)? What reservations might you have, and how could you overcome them?

2. Reflect on the story of José who had lost all contact with the outside world until his sight was surgically restored. He celebrated being re-connected to the community by flashing his smile. Is there a specific connection you hunger for? What would it take to achieve it?

Similarly, John Karmegan endured a lifetime of being judged on his appearance. A simple gesture of acceptance gave John what he had been thirsting for—the sign that he belonged. Share some instances of how you have been included by others, and how you might extend that kindness to someone else.

Although leprosy is rare in developed societies, we have our own groups who feel excluded or rejected based on things such as race, gender, religion, physical or mental disability, age, sexual orientation, economic status, or ethnicity. How can we do a better job of noticing and responding to those who are on the “outside”?

3. Do you ever struggle to believe that you matter? Think back to the 1946 Christmas classic *It's a Wonderful Life* in which an angel is sent from heaven to show a desperate man how his community would have suffered had he never existed. As Dr. Brand reminds us, we matter most in relation to the whole. How do you know that your participation in the Body of Christ makes any difference?

Have you ever seen evidence of your effect on the community?

It may be uncomfortable, but try to share one of your most valuable traits. How might it inspire or empower someone else to improve their relationship with God?

Within your group, take turns noting the faithful qualities you observe and respect in each other. Make a specific plan to affirm someone you know beyond the group, as well.

4. Dr. Brand compares the advantages of autonomy (the amoeba) with the advantages of specialization (the white blood cell). By nature, do you tend to find more pleasure in individual achievement or in working within a group?

In either situation, how do you experience the satisfaction of elevating the whole Body, what Dr. Brand calls the “ecstasy of community”?

5. Read Jesus’ prayer in John 17:20-21: “My prayer is not for [believers] alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” Dr. Brand contends that unity begins not with our similarity but with our diversity. Where have you seen a situation where differences are affirmed, rather than allowed to obstruct unity in the church?

Think of examples from church history, stories of public figures, accounts retold in this (or any) book, or your own church experience. What positive impact have you seen from embracing diversity?

6. We have learned from Dr. Brand about the upside-down values of God’s kingdom: the more we reach out beyond ourselves, the more we are enriched, and the more we then grow in likeness to God. The apostle Paul quotes Jesus as saying, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Have you found this to be true? If so, describe an experience when you gave of yourself to another and ended up gratified and enriched.

*Reflect:* “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship” (Romans 12:1). A vast network of blood vessels and neurons connects every cell in the physical body. In light of your connection to the larger Body of Christ, respond to God with a prayer. Meditate on how you can best serve the whole as one of its “cells.”

### PART THREE: OUTSIDE AND INSIDE (CHAPTERS 7–11)

1. Our skin is described as compliant: able to mold to another shape, protecting what it covers, and embracing what is grasped. Describe a situation in which you observed a particular act of compliance.

What does it look like when someone puts aside their own comfort to adapt to someone with a distinctly different faith, culture, or personality?

This type of servanthood takes resolve and practice. Think of someone who is particularly abrasive, and explore ways you can offer a softer touch. How might you better demonstrate the loving embrace of God?

2. Jesus set a high standard with his ministry, and we are encouraged to follow his example. He demonstrated love to one person at a time, face to face, hand to hand. We studied the value of direct contact in Part One, but what about the risk, the potential hazards of personal contact? Have you experienced a negative response when reaching into someone's life? Did it cause you to retreat? Explain what happened.

Rather than becoming deterred by these risks, discuss how your outlook and preparation can keep such risks from preventing your participation in God's work.

3. In a vivid metaphor of grace, Dr. Brand illustrates how a healthy body responds to the pain of a wounded part. As members of the Body of Christ, we are given this same responsibility. Have you ever been able to support someone else who was serving your church community or local ministry? How did you become aware of his or her needs?

Discuss a few methods to increase mindfulness about the burdens others carry.

4. Dr. Brand identifies touch as his most precious diagnostic tool, a skill perfected after a great deal of practice. Have you been able to get “in touch with” the needs of someone close to you? Did you (or can you) develop an improved awareness of how to help? How?

Genuine concern generates greater trust. Identify a relationship in which you would like to offer assistance, but first need to earn trust. List any specific steps you might be able to take.

5. Bones do not burden or restrict us; they support us and enable us to move. God's rules are designed like bones, to provide a strong foundation and framework for our faith. Give an example of how an unchanging principle can provide freedom for a believer.

Just as stress stimulates bone growth, our challenges often leave us stronger. Share a situation when you felt pushed to the limit and emerged with greater faith?

6. Have you ever endured, or are you currently facing, an episode of doubt? Do you know someone whose faith has been shaken? Dr. Brand reminds us that it is helpful to identify the most basic skeleton of your belief. What can you trust to be true? How can these core beliefs help you or others in times of doubt? Consider the example of the shaky bridge. How can the leadership of those who have passed before you provide the courage to move forward?

Recount times when you have found God to be faithful, and list these incidences. Rely on this knowledge to assure you in wobbly times.

*Reflect:* "Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows." (Luke 12:7). Our skin cells live only two or three weeks; we lose and regenerate several million of these cells each day. Respond in a prayer of gratitude for the intimate care God promises each member of the Body—including you—and ask for the faith to trust that loving care.

#### PART FOUR: PROOF OF LIFE (CHAPTERS 12–15)

1. Jesus' short time on earth included many acts that still serve as symbols for us today. Before being crucified, he shared one final meal with his followers. That evening, Jesus applied a new meaning to the traditional Passover meal, instructing us to repeat his actions, to remember him (Luke 22:19). What has been your traditional experience of the Lord's Supper (also known as Eucharist, Holy Communion, Breaking of Bread, and many other terms)?

Has the analogy offered by Dr. Brand expanded your understanding? What are some new applications you may have gleaned?

Explain how this ceremony can offer meaning, in the past, present, and future.

2. Blood serves as a cleansing agent in the body. Apply this function of blood to what we've learned about forgiveness. Dr. Brand explains that repentance works when each cell "willingly avails itself of the cleansing action of blood." Do you ever struggle to accept or appreciate the liberating gift of forgiveness?

Just as toxins impede our physical health, even causing us pain, how does sin interfere with our spiritual state?

Please share an example of how repentance can benefit us, removing contaminants from a lifestyle or relationship. (Use your personal story, if you feel comfortable.)

3. Dr. Brand describes the process of immunizations. How does this help illustrate the power of Jesus' blood to overcome evil in the world?

Does this knowledge equip you to overcome your own temptations, as it did for Dr. Brand? In what ways? How can this serve as a reminder to rely on the strength of Jesus rather than your own ability, when facing troubles?

To help this concept sink in, use your own words to restate how Jesus overcame evil.

4. Just as breath sustains the life of our bodies, our Christian faith is sustained by the power of the Spirit. Do you notice a difference in your life when you actively invite the Spirit to lead you? What about when you pause to become aware of God's will, inspired in you? Take time to reflect on how you can improve this practice. Share with others any insights you have found to be helpful.
5. Let's turn to muscles and review how they operate. Like a digital circuit, they respond to a single on-off command to contract. Motion involves an intricate system of levers (bones) and counterbalancing muscles. In addition, muscles must be used (exercised); if an injury or illness prevents motion, the muscles atrophy. Use similarities you recognize in your own spiritual life to draw comparisons within the Body of Christ.



Give examples of growing stronger spiritually with use, or weaker with neglect.

6. When a muscle contracts on its own, it is called spastic—not a malfunction but a rogue action with disregard for the rest of the body. Considering the parallel within the Body of Christ, discuss the slippery slope of doing “good things” for the wrong reason.

How can we be slowly seduced into self-serving behaviors?

Dr. Brand points out the need for special grace to resist egocentric tendencies and notes the power through which God “gently communicates to us.” What is your experience with this power?

*Reflect:* “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). During a typical lifetime, a human heart beats over 2.5 billion times, pumping over two hundred million liters of nourishing blood. Respond with prayer for strength as we face troubles in this world, and with thanksgiving for the cleansing power of forgiveness when we fail.

## PART FIVE: THE LANGUAGE OF PAIN (CHAPTERS 16–18)

1. Pain functions like a language, speaking in a wide range of intensity and volume to alert the body of danger. As Dr. Brand explains, our pain messages trigger important responses throughout our bodies. Thinking now of the pain and peril we encounter in our communities and relationships, describe some signals you have identified as a call for help (including those you use).

Dr. Brand tells us that limping indicates one type of successful adaptation: to avoid to avoid further leg or foot injury. Where have you found the need to adapt—to limp—when a situation becomes painful?

How might you encourage others to do the same?

How well do you recognize and respond to the “limping” you encounter?

2. As we’ve seen in the illustrations of patients with leprosy, when the body’s pain system fails to send warnings, the damage can be

permanent. Recall the story of Sadan, who nearly lost his hands because he lacked that pain signal. Applying this principle to our role in the Body of Christ, how can we protect from this damage?

Offer any personal stories of when an early-warning system may have failed or was ignored. What damage resulted? Include thoughts on how this damage could have been avoided.

3. Although it may seem paradoxical, pain serves a vital role in uniting the cells of the body. Our cells cooperate to send and react to the alarm of pain, urgently demanding attention and rerouting resources as needed. When this pain message fades, certain areas can become detached, and we can disregard the neediest members. How does this apply to our connection with members of Christ's Body, locally and across the globe? Give specific examples.

What does this imply regarding our response to those who are suffering? How could pain and suffering serve to unify the church?

4. Read 1 Corinthians 12:24-26: "God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it."

The apostle Paul recognized that a healthy spiritual Body functions much like a healthy physical body. As members, we are instructed to share the pain of all other members, to feel the pain of the weakest part. We are invited to become the tangible presence of God, especially in times when those suffering feel separated from God's love. Have you observed a time when the stronger members of the Body became an expression of the love of God? Explain.

Closer to home, tell a story of a time when you were in a particularly painful situation—how did others attend to you? Was it enough? Did you feel a sense of God's concern for you?

5. We face risks when tending to the needs around us. For some, repeatedly responding to the most urgent crisis will lead to burnout from overexertion. For others, being inundated with images of

suffering will cause them to become numb or disinterested. It is also possible to lose motivation when a solution to a huge problem does not seem possible. Take heart. God has not called us to resolve every painful situation we see. God has, however, given you a particular interest, some personal expertise, and a unique opportunity. Search your heart and describe an area of need that you are particularly drawn to.

How can you make a difference in an area that might not be attracting much attention? What is the value of smaller contributions over an extended period of time—say, to a needy person in your neighborhood or congregation?

6. Within the Body of Christ, just as in all groups of associated people, conflict and irritation are bound to happen. Dr. Brand suggests that we observe the remarkable way our joints are designed and use this as a source of inspiration for avoiding friction. How would you extend the metaphor?

Think of the roles of various components such as cartilage, canaliculi (channels), synovial fluid; consider the process of lubrication, as well as the amount and distribution of contact. Where does grace become critical, and how would you apply it?

*Reflect:* “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst?” (1 Corinthians 3:16). The friction of a joint such as the knee is only one-fifth that of highly polished metal—about as slippery as ice on ice. In view of what you have learned, pray in gratitude for “the gift of pain” and for the privilege of helping reduce the pain of others.

## PART SIX: THE BODY’S CEO (CHAPTERS 19–23)

1. Seven times in the New Testament, Christ is identified as the Head of the church. His leadership style employed the perfect blend of coordination, instruction, and delegation. The functional hierarchy of our nervous system mirrors this structure. Many actions are initiated by reflex, others by direct order, and the “will” of local neurons can

override most muscle activity through “the final common path.” Are you aware of any organizations that successfully lead with such a healthy balance? If so, please identify them.

Explore how we can apply the concept of “the final common path” to relationships in our personal lives, our professional positions, and our participation in church (as leaders or members).

2. When on earth, Jesus was the leader of a small group of followers. Now that he has ascended, he serves as Head of a new Body, the church, composed of men and women from all over the world. Talk about this distinction.

As an individual member of the Body of Christ, in what ways can you prepare yourself to listen and respond more attentively to Christ, our Head?

3. God makes his presence known to the world through imperfect people like us, representing all races, sizes, IQs, personalities, and genetic traits. This involves a sort of abdication in which God sets aside omnipotence and adopts a behind-the-scenes role in human history. God’s own reputation, as well as that of believers, is tarnished by human failures. The personal conduct of some celebrities professing to be Christian, and even of some church leaders, has contributed to this blemish. Without delving into gossip or specific details, talk about how you deal with reports of this type, and how you think God would want us to react.

What, if anything, can we do to restore the image of God in the world?

How do you respond to this “Divine Trust”?

4. As members of a spiritual Body, we each participate in the marvel of direct contact with the Head. The practice of spiritual discipline is one way to enhance this active relationship with God. Dr. Brand mentions a few ancient and current spiritual disciplines: meditation, fasting, prayer, simple living, worship, celebration, and methodically repeating certain prayers. Are you currently practicing any of these or others? Please share your experience, including what benefit you may have discovered.

Have you adopted any other routines that assist you to hear God's voice and center yourself in God's will? Share something of your personal experience with this intimate relationship.

5. Dr. Brand tells us of the three people in whom he saw the image of God most clearly. What stood out in their descriptions?

Is there anyone in your personal life who reflects the image of God in a way that has profoundly affected you? Take a minute to talk about what you have observed, and how it encourages you.

Make a commitment to share your observations with this person as well. We all need encouragement.

6. We have studied several spiritual lessons regarding the likeness of God in our bodies. The final image is that of the hands of Christ. As his hands, we are entrusted with the mission of reaching out in a variety of ways—to offer comfort, to meet needs, to provide healing—in short, to be the very presence of God. Share any new or refreshed commitment you have made to be an active member of the Body of Christ.

Talk about your willingness to take action, in light of this responsibility we have been given, and address any apprehension you may have.

In your final conversation, take time to sum up the sense of awe and wonder you have gained regarding how we are created, and our trusted position of honor in the Body of Christ.

*Reflect:* “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” (Romans 12:2). Each of the trillions of cells in your body has direct access to the brain, able to connect and communicate across the brain's hundreds of trillion synapses. Respond with a personal prayer expressing your desire to hear and follow God's will.