



Let's Pray: January 2022 'Together'

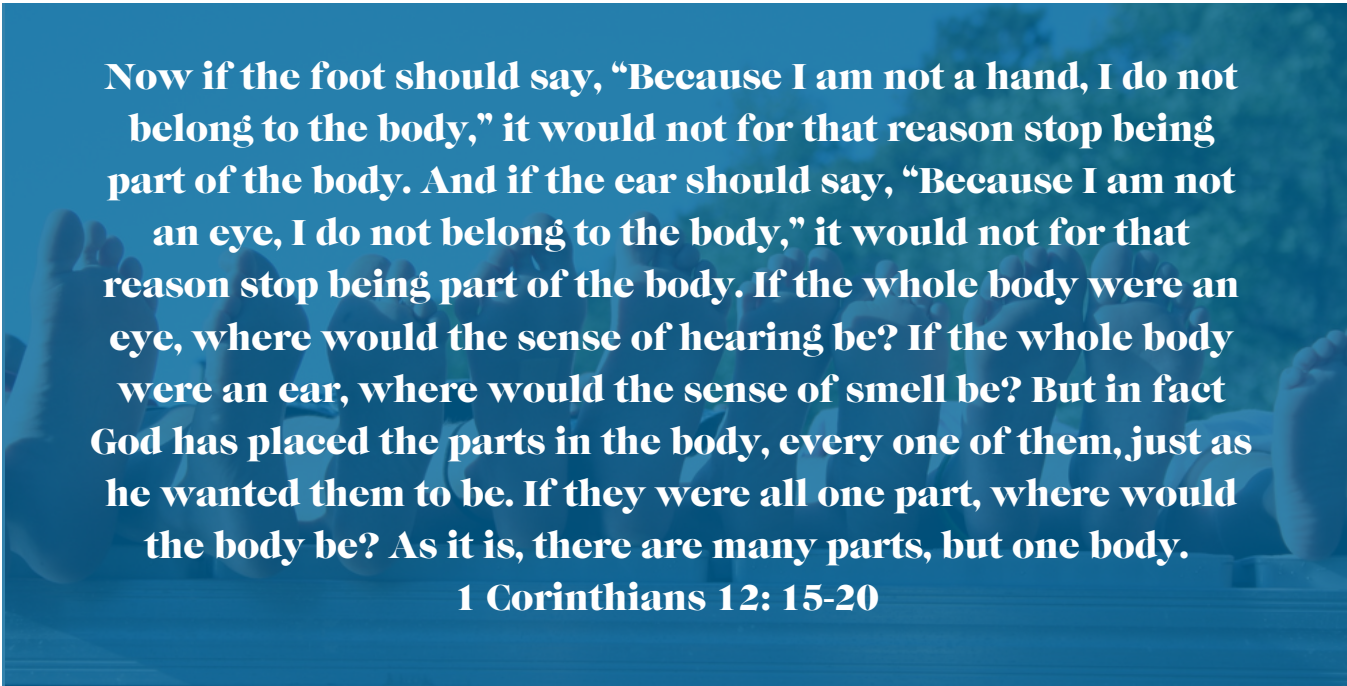
How can we pray well as we
head into this new year?

There's a word we use a lot at Home for Good, because we believe in it:

Together.

Together we can make a difference. **Together** we can go far, with and on behalf of care-experienced children and young people in the UK. **Together** we can find a home for every child who needs one.

There aren't many things that demonstrate the complex beauty of 'togetherness' like the words of 1 Corinthians 12. This month's prayer resource breaks 1 Corinthians 12: 12-27 into three parts to allow us to reflect on what it means to be part of the body of Christ and to help us pray for care-experienced children and young people and their families.



Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 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 placed 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? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

1 Corinthians 12: 15-20

You'll have heard it said, 'comparison is the thief of joy.' It can be so easy to focus on what we are not or what we don't have, particularly when we observe the lives of others around us with rose-tinted glasses. Perhaps for some, comparison has been the obstacle preventing you from exploring what their role could be in caring for children and young people, be that through fostering, adoption or supported lodgings or in a supportive role. Have you ever had a thought along the lines of, "I couldn't do what they do. They're amazing!" or "I care about this, but because of my relationship/finances/living situation/job, I know it wouldn't work."

The truth is that actually, many of the things we think might prevent us for caring for children aren't barriers at all; rather, areas that need to be explored and discussed in order to see if you could provide a safe, stable and welcoming home for a child, and that you have the level of support you will need.

It's absolutely true that not everyone is in a position to welcome a child or young person into their home. But that doesn't mean you have no part to play. In order to thrive, fostering and adoptive families and supported lodgings host need a community of support behind, before and around them. Some of us can use our voice to advocate for change. Some of us can provide helpful, practical support with meals, transport or help with tasks. Some can pray, and provide a listening ear. Some can use their role in church or in school to ensure that children and young people are safe and welcome. **We all have a part to play.**

The body analogy in Corinthians reminds us of the truth; that an inability to do something another can doesn't make us invaluable. It reminds us that there is beauty in diversity, and that each of us has a unique contribution to make.

But I think it's important to remember that this message reaches beyond just what we can do. It's not about utility. What truly matters is that each part has been designed, chosen and placed, one-by-one, exactly where God wanted it to be. The ear isn't just valuable because it hears – because actually, not all ears do – it has intrinsic value by just existing as part of the body. The foot isn't just valuable because it walks – because actually, not all feet do – it has intrinsic value by just existing as part of the body.

God looks at us and sees not what we lack, but what we bring to the body, and He calls us valuable and necessary. Our worth lies not in what we can do, but in who we are: beloved children of God. In case you need reminding today: You are unique, and that is a good thing. You are valuable not because of what you can do, but because of who you are. You have a part to play.



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!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour...

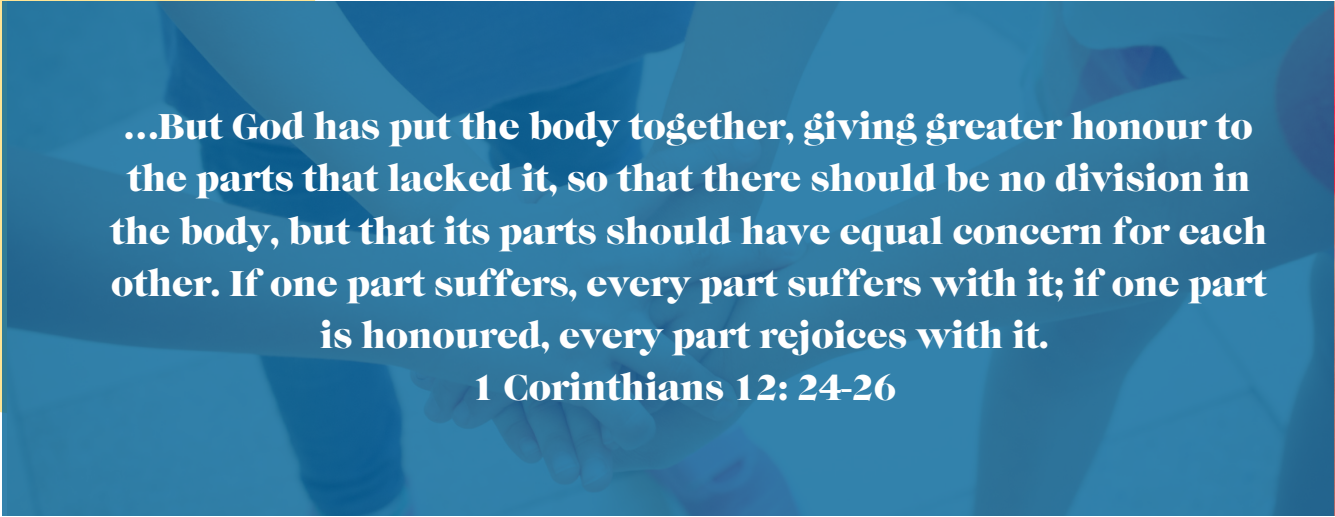
1 Corinthians 12: 21-23

There's a famous quote attributed to Albert Einstein: "Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid." Our society looks through a skewed lens when it comes to achievement, success and importance. It focusses on money and material wealth; it prefers the 'hustle' over the slow-burn. I think it can be particularly evident in education, where unfortunately we sometimes see importance on academic achievement placed above character and holistic well-being. While it's right and wonderful that we celebrate children who do well in tests and tasks, my heart aches for the child who always tries their best but is never the best. The young person whose passion for music flourishes under a pair of headphones, but who feels anxious at the sight of a music theory exam page. The child whose attendance grade is low because of moves, meetings, changes of plans or difficult days. The child who, because of what they've experienced, doesn't yet feel safe in a classroom and therefore, cannot learn.

We, the body, need one another. Yet there are so many individuals, groups and communities who all-too-often are at the receiving end of dismissal and dishonour.

Bound by our presumptions of what is good, what is needed; I wonder what we're missing? I wonder what gifts, stories, passions and relationships exist in our communities, but are overlooked in our narrow pursuit of what is important? I wonder how much fuller an experience of life 'together' we could have if we invested deeper in seeing, listening, valuing and celebrating those faces, voices and ideas? I wonder what of God's character are we yet to discover as we see His likeness reflected in others around us?

We often pray, 'Your kingdom come, and Your will be done.' What if the kingdom is a place where those parts of the body all-too-often viewed as weaker are cherished as indispensable and treated with honour? What if ushering in God's kingdom on earth means a shift in how we measure success, ability and importance, and a search for glimpses of the image of God in those we encounter?



...But God has put the body together, giving greater honour 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 honoured, every part rejoices with it.

1 Corinthians 12: 24-26

Body parts don't work in isolation. They work together and depend on one another to function. If something isn't right somewhere, the rest of the body will soon know about it.

Think of your own; if part of it is hurting or injured, you have two options. You can look away, pretend it's not happening and push through the pain in an effort to continue with normality, or you can direct your attention and your resources towards it, taking pressure off, allowing pain to ease, symptoms to alleviate. The former might seem more convenient, allowing us to get on with things as they are, but it's not sustainable. The latter takes time, it takes effort, it takes changing plans and sometimes sacrifice, but healing can't happen any other way.

Every 15 minutes in the UK, a child will come into care. A significant number of those in need of a safe and loving foster family experience three or more moves each year. Black children wait longer for adoption than other children and are least likely to ever get adopted. Care leavers make up 25% of the homeless population.

The word 'compassion' has Latin roots, literally meaning 'co-suffering.' As much as it might be easier or more comfortable or convenient to ignore what's happening in our society – these children and young people are part of us.

How will we choose to respond?

Points for Prayer

1) But in fact God has placed 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?

Thank God for the beauty that exists in community as we each bring our own unique qualities, gifts and stories. Give thanks for the fact that each one of us has something to offer to welcome and support care-experienced children.

Pray that individuals, families and whole church communities will be inspired to consider what their part could be.

And let's thank God for His love for us; love that is not reliant on what we do, but that is lavished on us purely because we are His children.

2) 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!"

Pray for those individuals, groups and communities who all-too-often are at the receiving end of dismissal and dishonour. Pray in particular for children and young people who, perhaps due to the loss and trauma they've experienced, have a different experience of education compared to their peers. Pray that they will meet teachers and other staff who see them, who understand them, and who celebrate them.

Let's pray that that we, the Church, will recognise that we need one another, and that we might be the ones to see, listen, value and celebrate.

3) If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.

Let's pray together for children and young people. Pray for those who are feeling the pain of separation and loss; pray that they will experience the comfort of God, and that people in their lives will support them to navigate and process those feelings and experiences.

Pray for those who right now are waiting for the right home to be found for them. Pray that God's presence will be near, bringing peace to that uncertainty. Pray boldly for more foster carers, supportive lodgings hosts and adoptive families to provide a place of safety and belonging for these precious children.

Pray for care-experienced teenagers as they approach adulthood and its associated responsibility and independence. Pray for those who feel lonely and isolated, and for those who need practical support, that they will be drawn into loving community.

Let's pray that the Church – the body – will recognise that we are one; that we won't shy away from what is difficult, but will turn our attention towards and respond.



Creative Prayer Idea - words of encouragement

Take time to pray for someone in your life. You may want to use the following steps to guide your prayer:

1. Find somewhere comfortable to sit. Place both feet on the floor, and if it feels comfortable to you, place your hands on your lap with your palms facing up. Become aware of your breath as you inhale and exhale. Say to God with your body, "I am open to what you have to say to me today."
2. Think about the different parts that make up the body in your own family, church or community. Does a particular face come to your mind? If not, use the quiet to think of someone close to you. Acknowledge any thoughts or feelings that immediately come to mind. And if your thoughts wander, have grace with yourself and gently draw your focus back to the individual you are praying about.
3. With this person's face in your mind:
 - Take one minute to think about a quality you love about this individual. It might be attached to a particular memory. Tell God about that quality.
 - Take one minute to ask God what He loves about this individual, and listen in silence for what He may have to share with you.
 - Take one minute to thank God for this individual and to pray a prayer of blessing for them.
 - Take one minute to consider: what part do they bring to the body? Share any ideas you have with God.

After you finish your time of prayer, find some paper and a pen and write a note to the individual you prayed for, acknowledging their qualities, their gifts, and all they bring to the world. Be detailed and specific, and let this individual know that they matter, that they are important, that they are valuable. You might want to keep your note anonymous, but if you feel it would be more encouraging for this individual to know who these words have come from, feel free to sign your name. Post your note to this individual to brighten their day and remind them of their worth.