

5 Reasons to Know Someone Different Than You

Winter seems to go on forever in the city of Sameness. Most of us just escape to our favorite coffee shop to order the one (and only) thing on the menu: warm water. I usually run into Female 1 and Female 2 when I visit, and today was no different. They have brown eyes and brown hair and wear their typical white pants and a black shirt. We talk about how we look forward to spring, though we are content with winter. I ask others in the coffee shop how they're doing, and the response is always and only, "Great!" We move on to the next thing, which is much of the same. In the city of Sameness, we don't try to get to know others because everyone is the same.

OK, you're probably not pulling up Google Maps to find directions to Sameness, yet how often do we isolate ourselves from those not like us?

There is nothing at all wrong with having commonalities. Paul urges the Philippians to complete his joy by "being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind" (Phil. 2:2, ESV). At first glance, we might conclude that Paul wants them (and us) to be the exact same. The "same mind" he is referring to is the mind of Christ. We are to strive for humility as we relate to one another, looking to the interests of others and doing nothing for selfish gain (vv. 3-4). This is the example of Jesus, who "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself" (vv. 6-7). So sameness here is all about being united in gospel humility.

But Paul recognized that there was great benefit in differences, namely (but not only) demonstrated through spiritual gifts. In 1 Corinthians, he shares about the benefit of each member of a church and their gifting by using the

analogy of a body without hands or feet. The body functions fully and most effectively when each part is playing its essential role. Each member of the church is important and needed because God has generously given a variety of gifts. (See 1 Corinthians 12:12-26.)

The full context of the text in reference is about the function of the church, but the ideas can be applied to all of our lives. There is a benefit in knowing and interacting with others who are not just like us.

And if we want to apply fully Paul's encouragement to the Corinthians, knowing others who are not like ourselves allows for greater flourishing. We lose out when we stick with those just like us.

Here are five benefits of knowing someone different than you:

1. Serving. As already mentioned, one benefit of knowing those who are not just like us is that we benefit from a variety of gifts in the body. God intentionally did not make us all the same. God has given each of us spiritual gifts according to His great wisdom (Rom. 12:6). The purposes of these gifts aren't so that we can flaunt them or keep them for our own good. Just the opposite (v. 3). The purpose of spiritual gifts is for the benefit of others. By knowing those who are not like us, we learn to serve others with the varied gifts God has given us for their benefit and their good.

2. A taste of heaven now. Heaven will be filled with people from Indonesia, Dubai, Zambia, the Appalachian Mountains of East Tennessee and the Grand Cayman Islands. Worshipping on the last day will be people speaking French, German, Spanish, English, Tagalog and Arabic. And today we can get a foretaste of heaven when we step out of our comfort zones to get to know someone not like us.

3. Edification. Along with a variety of gifts, we all have a variety of experiences. Life doesn't look the exact same for

every person. Unless someone gets to know me, they'd never know that I traveled abroad, played the flute or have had four miscarriages. God can use the experiences of others to encourage our faith, help us make decisions or provide comfort. God's Word is filled with Scriptures encouraging us to build one another up. The Lord may just use that person who is not like you to bring the unique comfort you need from Him.

4. Racial reconciliation. There's a rumor that we are post-racial, but the reality is not only are we not past racial divides, but we also continue to hear about division, racism and tragic circumstances involving race throughout the country. Knowing others who are not like you is one way to display to the world that in Christ we are the same. The gospel unifies us and is what the Lord uses to bring racial reconciliation. We are all made equally in the image of God, and when we display the unity found throughout Scripture, it speaks of the power of the gospel to make us united.

5. Gain of understanding and wisdom. Have you ever heard the term "ignorance is bliss"? It means that what we don't know won't hurt us. We can live unaware and unscathed by that which we don't know. When relating to others, ignorance is not bliss; it's just plain old ignorance. Instead of remaining unknowing, we should instead strive to gain understanding through developing relationships with those not like us.

God intentionally created us unique. He could have made us all the exact same. He had the power to do that. Instead He chose to create us each by name and with great thought (Ps. 139:13). He even delights over those he created (Zeph. 3:17). And He gives each of us to one another to learn and grow from—this is His gift to us.

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