create greater synergy and cohesion among members of the group. Consider the energy and excitement and the sense of “we’re in this together” generated in a worship service when a group of people sings together. There is even value in simply sharing a meal, says Annie Paul, and the effect is heightened if the food is very spicy and served family-style.

Our thinking is also helped by taking what she calls an “awe walk.” Get out of your home or office and spend some time outdoors. Allow yourself to be moved by the majesty of nature. Awe can act as a “reset button” for the human brain, shaking us loose from old patterns and opening us up to new ways of thinking.

Reflecting on this book, psychologist Emily Balcetis says, “intelligence can be found, in part, in our brains, but perhaps even more importantly in our hearts and skin, 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.” Not one brain, but an extended mind.

Although the apostle Paul was not a psychologist, he knew all about the insight found beyond the minds of individuals. “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters,” he wrote to the Corinthians, “I do not want you to be uninformed” (1 Corinthians 12:1). He wanted them to know how the Holy Spirit was at work in their lives, both as individuals and as a community. The Spirit offered them *spiritually* distributed cognition.

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit,” said Paul, “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” (vv. 4-7). There is one God giving a variety of gifts to a variety of people. Together, these people form one body, the Church, with one extended mind, and the common goal is the common good. Think of the officers and sailors of the *Palau* hurtling toward San Diego Harbor; Japanese schoolchildren doing calisthenics together; Astronauts and Mission Control working in tandem; members of a congregation sharing a mission project or a potluck meal: The goal is always the common good.

To achieve this goal, the Spirit gives “the utterance of wisdom” to one, and the “utterance of knowledge” to another. The Spirit gives to others the gifts of faith, healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, various kinds of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. All these gifts come from the same Spirit to advance the common good, in an act of spiritually distributed cognition (vv. 8-11).

Within the church today, we have this same experience of different gifts at work in different people. We would be far less insightful, and far less effective, if everyone had the same spiritual gift. But even though we have a variety of gifts, we are one Christian community. “For just as the body is one and has many members,” said Paul, “and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ” (v. 12). We are one Christian body, with socially and spiritually distributed cognition. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we have an extended mind.

The value of such thinking is seen whenever a group of young people joins the church. At Fairfax Presbyterian Church in Virginia, members of a confirmation class stood before the elders, deacons, and trustees of the church. They stated their faith and presented their confirmation projects. Together, they represented different parts of the body of Christ, and they showed the power of socially and spiritually distributed cognition. Emily, spoke about how philosophers and theologians, including Saint Thomas Aquinas, influenced her. Aquinas wrote extensively about the body of Christ and the church; and said at one point that “the Head and Members are as One Mystical Person.” In other words, there is always going to be spiritual solidarity between Christ, the head of the church, and all of us who are members of his body.

Another class member, Faith, spoke passionately about how her faith has helped her navigate life. Clark used his own hands to craft a pencil that he used to write his statement of faith. Serena talked about her running and her faith. Kirstyn, a martial arts enthusiast, used her hands and her feet to break boards to demonstrate how faith enabled her to break through personal obstacles. They represented a variety of gifts, activities, members, and parts; but they were one body. As Aquinas said, “One Mystical Person.” One extended Christian mind.

We are much smarter together than we would be apart, and much more effective as well. In confirmation classes and in the larger church, each person “is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (v. 7). Whether our passion is theology, writing, running or martial arts; teaching, cooking, building, or preaching; social work, nursing, fundraising, or accounting, our gifts can advance the common good.

All these passions “are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses” (v. 11). The Spirit of God is the activator, not us. The Spirit activates some to sing sacred choral music with a choir, some to offer contemporary Christian music with a praise team. The Spirit activates some to take medicine to Guatemala, some to feed the homeless in the United States. The Spirit activates some to meet for small group Bible study, some to gather for book discussions, and some to teach children in Sunday school. The Spirit activates each of these efforts, and we would be a much dumber and much less effective church without them.

It is time for us to abandon the myth of the lone genius and replace it with belief in an extended Christian mind. This is a challenging shift, because we are indebted to so many great individuals: Abraham, Moses, Mary Magdalene, and Paul, just to name a few. But, in truth, none of them were lone geniuses? Abraham needed Lot and Sarah to travel with him in faith, toward the land of Canaan (Genesis 12:5). Moses asked his brother Aaron to speak for him (Exodus 4:16). When Mary arrived at the empty tomb, she ran to tell Simon Peter and the beloved disciple (John 20:2).

And Paul? He had numerous traveling companions, including Timothy (Acts 16:1). Paul wanted Timothy to join him because the young man’s mother was Jewish and his father was a Greek, and he could relate to both communities. Acts tells us that after Timothy joined Paul and Silas in their work, “the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in numbers daily” (v. 5).

The extended Christian mind. We have one Spirit, one faith, and one Lord Jesus; but the gifts of God are given to us in a variety of forms, so that we can be both smart and effective as we do God’s work in the world.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to surrender our lives to You and use the gifts and graces with which we are blessed with wisdom and for Your greater glory. Thank You, that we are part of the wider Body of Christ, fitted together as Your holy dwelling place. We pray that together we may learn to use our spiritual gifts for the benefit of the whole Body, and rejoice that we are One in Christ, through time and into eternity. In Jesus' name, AMEN.

**Sources:**

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**The Extended Mind**

Sunday, January 23, 2022 [1 Corinthians 12:1-11](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+12%3a1-11&language=en&version=NIV)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

The story is told of the *USS* *Palau*, an aircraft carrier,speeding toward San Diego Harbor when its engines failed. The crew needed to act quickly to avert disaster; but no one person had the key to stopping the runaway ship. Fortunately, the captain, navigator, quartermaster, chief and navigation team pooled their brawn and their brains to come up with some makeshift repairs. They saved the day by using their extended mind. No single brain prevented the tragedy, but many working together, did!

We tend to honor the geniuses who appear to achieve great things on their own, whether they are working in science, the arts, business, or technology. But this idea of a lone genius is a myth. The most successful minds in history made their breakthroughs with the help of others. Michelangelo worked with a team of assistants to paint the Sistine Chapel. Albert Einstein analyzed the work of others as he developed his own theories. Neil Armstrong became the first man to step foot on the moon because thousands of engineers, mathematicians, and supporting staff worked together to get him there.

And the apostle Paul? He lived in Corinth with a couple named Aquila and Priscilla, and they worked together as tentmakers (Acts 18:3). Just imagine the conversations they had over their sewing, as Paul prepared to argue in the synagogue and try to convince people to follow Jesus. Collaboration brings fresh ideas and new perspectives. Bringing people together from diverse backgrounds, often across borders, leads to new ways of thinking, better solutions, and faster progress.

Last year, science writer Annie Murphy Paul wrote a book called *The Extended Mind: The Power of Thinking Outside the Brain.* In the book, she challenges us to tap the intelligence that exists beyond our brains: the intelligence in our bodies, in our surroundings, and in our relationships. Our thinking, which is often referred to as “cognition,” is improved by connections all around us.

Annie Murphy Paul argues that walking or exercising together leads us to behave more cooperatively and to be more successful in achieving shared goals. Take for example, the morning calisthenics which are broadcast over Japanese radio; routines followed by people ranging from Sony executives to public school children. These shared exercises