

The Puzzle of Strengths, Part 1: The Puzzle of Unique Strengths

A jigsaw puzzle is a set of numerous interlocking pieces which are assembled to produce a complete picture, often of nature, landscapes, or a recognizable piece of art. Each piece of the puzzle is unique. When fit together, each piece contributes to the entire puzzle.

A jigsaw puzzle is an apt depiction of the Body of Christ. Each of our strengths represents a unique piece of a puzzle. When our strengths are combined, we make a whole.

Unique Puzzle Pieces Fit In More Easily

Most jigsaw puzzles are “fully interlocking,” meaning adjacent pieces interconnect with one another.

But the shapes of puzzle pieces differ greatly. Some pieces have straight edges to be used in the puzzle border. Some puzzles even feature “whimsy pieces” which are cut into specific recognizable shapes, like flowers or animals. Many puzzle pieces are four-sided, with rounded tabs on two opposite ends and gaps on other sides to fit tabs of adjacent pieces.

But even puzzle pieces in this standard shape are very different from one another. The size of the tabs and gaps on the ends may be larger or smaller. Or the distance between the tabs and gaps varies.

Regardless of puzzle piece shapes, when they have obvious differences it is easier to fit them together. Odd, unique, irregular, and offbeat pieces stand out.

So do puzzle pieces with distinct colors and visual textures. It's common to pull out pieces with a bit of red or yellow, for example, and put together those sections first - or pluck out an unusually shaped piece and find its neighbors quickly.

Uniqueness in puzzle pieces is a strength.

Similar Pieces Have a Harder Time Fitting In

Ironically, the most difficult jigsaw puzzles to complete are those with uniformly shaped pieces or those made of all one color. Sameness creates a problem.

Quite simply, the pieces are too much alike to distinguish from one another. It is extremely hard to find the right place for pieces that look alike.

Why Your Unique Strengths Bring Others Together

Differences are strengths - both with jigsaw puzzles and in the Body of Christ.

In our drive for acceptance, we may be tempted to think that being different is not a good thing. A person who is unconventional or who possesses unusual abilities may fear being ostracized.

God takes a different approach.

Just as unique pieces of a jigsaw puzzle are a key in allowing sections of a puzzle to come together, so it is with individual strengths. Your uniqueness makes you stand out, allowing you to find your place in God's story.

When you understand your strengths and are in place - functioning well - others can interconnect with you more easily. The whole comes together.

Don't think for one minute that your uniqueness isolates you. When you recognize your strengths and begin to lead from those strengths, you help others to do the same.

Like a one-of-a-kind puzzle piece, your strengths make a special place for you ... and allow others to fit in.

Growth Point

Your unique strengths define a special role for you. Scripture God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. (1 Corinthians 12:18, NIV) Prayer Points

Describe one of your strengths you may view as odd, unusual, irregular, or offbeat.

Have you been told this quality is unique or have you arrived at your conclusion on your own? How can the drive for acceptance snuff out your uniqueness? God planned your uniqueness. How does that comfort or encourage you? Devotionals: The Puzzle of Strengths.

The Puzzle of Strengths, Part 2: The Puzzle of Interlocking Pieces

A jigsaw puzzle is a set of numerous interlocking pieces which are assembled to produce a complete picture, often of nature, landscapes, or a recognizable piece of art. Each piece is unique. When fit together, each piece contributes to the entire puzzle.

A jigsaw puzzle is an apt depiction of the Body of Christ. Each of us represents a unique piece of a puzzle. When our strengths are combined, we make a whole.

Interlocking Puzzle Pieces Fit Together

Most jigsaw puzzles are "fully interlocking," meaning adjacent pieces interconnect with one another. The fit is both structural and visual. When combined correctly, the pieces produce the puzzle's visual image. But fully interlocking puzzles also stay joined structurally. Connections in between pieces of a completed interlocking jigsaw puzzle are tight enough to allow it to maintain its shape when it is moved.

On the other hand, non-interlocking puzzles are made up of pieces that are not as close-fitting. These pieces match up visually, but not always structurally. Pieces often shift around. When completed, the puzzle must remain where it was constructed, often in a box or on a flat surface. It is

moved or lifted off its surface it will not maintain its shape. Instead, pieces will fall apart.

God creates the Body of Christ to be like interlocking puzzle pieces, rather than non-interlocking ones. Each of us is endowed with unique strengths. When members of the Body find their strengths, use their strengths, and value strengths in one another, we interconnect with each other to form a whole. Together we are stronger and can withstand changeable movements that are part of growth. We're designed to fit together to reflect the character of Jesus ... and for our connections to remain strong.

But if you don't know your strengths and use them, you may shift purposelessly, much like non-interlocking puzzle pieces that lack clarity about fit.

Interlocking Puzzle Pieces Produce Order

What happens when you empty the content of the puzzle box onto the table and begin to sort through the pieces? Chaos reigns.

The first thing most serious puzzlers do is to turn the puzzle pieces face up and begin the sorting process. Each interlocking puzzle piece displays just a tiny part of the picture's full image. Puzzlers work to arrange pieces according to the image. Border pieces are grouped. Pieces with similar colors or visual textures are clustered so they can be assembled into smaller sections. Awareness begins to bring about order from the confusion.

Likewise, confusion can abound when God's people are not aware of their strengths. That's one reason the strengths discovery process is so powerful.

The process begins when you allow God to "sort" - or identify - your strengths. In discovering your strengths, you begin to see the tiny portion of God's image that you represent. God can reveal where He has placed you to use those strengths. He can use you to begin to create order.

Our God is not a God of confusion, but order (1 Corinthians 14:33).

Awareness of your strengths begins to bring about order from the confusion.

Interlocking Pieces Build on One Another

Puzzlers study sorted pieces to ascertain where one, then another, fit together. Sections in interlocking puzzles come together piece by piece, as one joins with another. A correctly-placed puzzle piece paves the way for more puzzle pieces to be added.

Likewise, the people in the Body of Christ are assembled one at a time. It begins when just one person is willing to be used where God places him.

That willingness is a win-win. As you begin to lead from your strengths and become willing to interlock with another, you not only connect with the

whole. You also create a means for others to do so, too. As you interconnect, you show others that their strengths are needed.

It takes just one person to start the interlocking puzzle piece process at home, at work, in the community, or in ministry - by discovering your strengths, using your strengths and valuing the strengths in others.

You can be that person.

Growth Point

Your strengths interlock with others' strengths.

Scripture

He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. (Ephesians 4:16, NLT)

Prayer Points

"The strengths discovery process is powerful." How have you seen that to be true? How do different strengths each reflect a tiny portion of God's character? What is one step God may be calling you to take to be a catalyst for interconnection in your home, at work, in the community, or in ministry? Devotionals: The Puzzle of Strengths.

The Puzzle of Strengths, Part 3: The Missing Puzzle Piece

A jigsaw puzzle is a set of numerous interlocking pieces which are assembled to produce a complete picture, often of nature, landscapes, or a recognizable piece of art. Each piece is unique. When fit together, each piece contributes to the entire puzzle.

A jigsaw puzzle is an apt depiction of the Body of Christ. Each of us represents a unique piece of the puzzle. As we discover our strengths and use them, we make a whole. When our strengths are combined, we also create opportunities for others around us to fit in, too.

The Maddening Missing Puzzle Piece

Can there be anything more frustrating for a puzzler than to have completed a section (or even an entire puzzle) only to discover that one piece or more is missing? If ever there was a situation that underscores the importance of an individual piece - or a person and his strengths - this is it. Just as missing pieces result in an unfinished puzzle, so do missing strengths lead to an incomplete Body of Christ.

Lest you believe that puzzle manufacturers routinely omit pieces by accident, rest assured that the puzzle industry has prodigiously stringent standards. A missing piece is hardly ever the result of a defective puzzle.

God's standards are even higher. He never omits a piece. It follows that when a puzzle piece goes missing, it can be restored. Pieces, whether they are part of a jigsaw puzzle or a part of the Body of Christ, can be found and can fit in. How does that happen?

Take Time to Look

Many times jigsaw puzzle pieces have been hidden underneath a cushion ... unintentionally dropped ... even overlooked in the box amidst the confusion or activity. A search leads to the piece's discovery.

It can be easy to overlook a person who doesn't know his strengths. In all the confusion and activity, people can drop by the wayside or are simply go unnoticed.

But when you stop to look at those around you (especially those who lack a sense of purpose or calling), you can point out their strengths. Reinforce what they do and encourage them. Take time to see the people God has placed in your path and speak intentionally into their lives.

Point to the Manufacturer

It may surprise you to learn that in cases when a jigsaw puzzle piece cannot be found, you can get one from the manufacturer. Many popular jigsaw puzzle manufacturers have created programs to replace individual pieces.

You can do the same when a person you know is struggling to find his fit: point him to the Manufacturer. You may not know a person's strengths. But God does.

Most people naturally accept that every person is different. You may be the means God uses when you share truths about strengths with another person. The dialogue may even open a doorway to a conversation about faith. The exchange could go something like this:

Explain the mystery of differences - and that God intentionally designed people differently. "God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose" (1 Corinthians 12:18, ESV) Explain that uniqueness is a gift: "I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14, ESV) Share ways people can discover their strengths. You might even point the person to the Leading From Your Strengths Profile.

A missing puzzle piece is not a tragedy. It is an opportunity for you to encourage another person by affirming his strengths ... and the chance for a person to find his unique strengths, use them, and grow in faith.

Growth Point

God can use you to help others find their strengths and fit in.

Scripture

God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. (1 Corinthians 12:18, ESV)

Prayer Points

Why might people naturally accept that every person is different, yet struggle to see their strengths? Ask God to point you to a person who needs you to point out and affirm his strengths. How can discovering and using strengths build up a person's faith? Devotionals: The Puzzle of

Strengths.