



Explore the Bible®

DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE



1,2 Corinthians

SPRING 2018 > CSB

Clint Pressley, General Editor

LifeWay | Adults



JESUS

Jesus changes lives. And everyone needs the opportunity to hear the life-changing message of the gospel of Christ.

That conviction led Paul to Corinth, a city famous for its immorality and religious pluralism. He was Christ's ambassador bringing a life-changing message from God to the Corinthians: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!" (2 Cor. 5:17).

The same gospel message Paul introduced in Corinth is good news for us too. Christ was with God the Father before the world was created. He became human and lived among humanity as Jesus of Nazareth. He came to show us what God the Father is like. He lived a sinless life, showing us how to live; and He died upon a cross to pay for our sins. God raised Him from the dead.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). He is waiting for you now.

- **Admit** to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning away from your sin.
- **By faith receive** Jesus Christ as God's Son and accept Jesus' gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross.
- **Confess** your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

You may pray a prayer similar to this as you call on God to save you: "Dear God, I know that You love me. I confess my sin and need of salvation. I turn away from my sin and place my faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord. In Jesus' name I pray, amen."

After you have received Jesus Christ into your life, tell a pastor or another Christian about your decision. Show others your faith in Christ by asking for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith.

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*Evangelistic Emphasis

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A WORD FROM THE GENERAL EDITOR



The church has never been perfect. Only the Lord of the church is perfect, a truth that is abundantly clear in 1 and 2 Corinthians. Here we find the gospel in all its glory and life with all its complexities. The Book of Ecclesiastes says, “there is nothing new under the sun,” and Paul’s letters to the church at Corinth prove the truism. Paul wrote to a people who loved Christ but struggled with division of all kinds, manifold rebellion, and downright immorality. When you read and study these two books, you are reminded that although Jesus is Lord of the church, there is no perfect church.

Even still, in these two books we learn the centrality of the cross, the meaning of marriage, the danger of lust, and how a church should be structured. We learn the importance of spiritual gifts, the value of diversity, and the joy of taking the Lord’s Supper.

Paul’s letters to the church ground us in the gospel of Christ and fill us with resurrection hope. And this hope does not disappoint. This hope gives us strength for endurance so that in our struggle, we do not lose heart.

These two books serve as a banquet table of gospel truth, served up for the strength and health of God’s people. At this critical hour, an intense and thorough study of these two books is sure to bring nourishment to the famished soul and strength to any gospel-centered church.

As you study 1 and 2 Corinthians, may the Spirit of God use the Word of God to anchor your confidence and hope in the Son of God.

Clint Pressley

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BIBLE READING PLAN

MARCH

- 1. 1 Corinthians 1:1-9
- 2. 1 Corinthians 1:10-17
- 3. 1 Corinthians 1:18-25
- 4. 1 Corinthians 1:26-31
- 5. 1 Corinthians 2:1-8
- 6. 1 Corinthians 2:9-16
- 7. 1 Corinthians 3:1-9
- 8. 1 Corinthians 3:10-17
- 9. 1 Corinthians 3:18-23
- 10. 1 Corinthians 4:1-5
- 11. 1 Corinthians 4:6-13
- 12. 1 Corinthians 4:14-21
- 13. 1 Corinthians 5:1-8
- 14. 1 Corinthians 5:9-13
- 15. 1 Corinthians 6:1-11
- 16. 1 Corinthians 6:12-20
- 17. 1 Corinthians 7:1-7
- 18. 1 Corinthians 7:8-16
- 19. 1 Corinthians 7:17-24
- 20. 1 Corinthians 7:25-31
- 21. 1 Corinthians 7:32-40
- 22. 1 Corinthians 8:1-6
- 23. 1 Corinthians 8:7-13
- 24. 1 Corinthians 9:1-7
- 25. 1 Corinthians 9:8-18
- 26. 1 Corinthians 9:19-27
- 27. 1 Corinthians 10:1-13
- 28. 1 Corinthians 10:14-22
- 29. 1 Corinthians 10:23-33
- 30. 1 Corinthians 11:1-6
- 31. 1 Corinthians 11:7-16

APRIL

- 1. 1 Corinthians 12:1-11
- 2. 1 Corinthians 12:12-17
- 3. 1 Corinthians 12:18-26
- 4. 1 Corinthians 12:27-31
- 5. 1 Corinthians 13:1-13
- 6. 1 Corinthians 14:1-5
- 7. 1 Corinthians 14:6-12
- 8. 1 Corinthians 14:13-19
- 9. 1 Corinthians 14:20-25
- 10. 1 Corinthians 14:26-32
- 11. 1 Corinthians 14:33-40
- 12. 1 Corinthians 15:1-11
- 13. 1 Corinthians 15:12-19
- 14. 1 Corinthians 15:20-28
- 15. 1 Corinthians 15:29-34
- 16. 1 Corinthians 15:35-49
- 17. 1 Corinthians 15:50-58
- 18. 1 Corinthians 16:1-4
- 19. 1 Corinthians 16:5-12
- 20. 1 Corinthians 16:13-24
- 21. 2 Corinthians 1:1-7
- 22. 2 Corinthians 1:8-11
- 23. 2 Corinthians 1:12-22
- 24. 2 Corinthians 1:23–2:4
- 25. 2 Corinthians 2:5-11
- 26. 2 Corinthians 2:12-17
- 27. 2 Corinthians 3:1-6
- 28. 2 Corinthians 3:7-11
- 29. 2 Corinthians 3:12-18
- 30. 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

MAY

- 1. 2 Corinthians 4:7-18
- 2. 2 Corinthians 5:1-5
- 3. 2 Corinthians 5:6-10
- 4. 2 Corinthians 5:11-15
- 5. 2 Corinthians 5:16-19
- 6. 2 Corinthians 5:20–6:2
- 7. 2 Corinthians 6:3-13
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- 14. 2 Corinthians 8:16-24
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- 22. 2 Corinthians 11:12-15
- 23. 2 Corinthians 11:16-23
- 24. 2 Corinthians 11:24-33
- 25. 2 Corinthians 12:1-5
- 26. 2 Corinthians 12:6-10
- 27. 2 Corinthians 12:11-13
- 28. 2 Corinthians 12:14-18
- 29. 2 Corinthians 12:19-21
- 30. 2 Corinthians 13:1-4
- 31. 2 Corinthians 13:5-13

MEMORY VERSES

Session 1:

But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles. —1 Corinthians 1:23

Session 2:

God raised up the LORD and will also raise us up by his power. —1 Corinthians 6:14

Session 3:

Let each one live his life in the situation the LORD assigned when God called him. This is what I command in all the churches.
—1 Corinthians 7:17

Session 4:

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.
—1 Corinthians 10:31

Session 5:

But as it is, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. —1 Corinthians 15:20

Session 6:

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the LORD's death until he comes. —1 Corinthians 11:26

Session 7:

So if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.
—1 Corinthians 12:26

Session 8:

Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy, is not boastful, is not arrogant.
—1 Corinthians 13:4

Session 9:

He comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God.
—2 Corinthians 1:4

Session 10:

Therefore, whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to be pleasing to him.
—2 Corinthians 5:9

Session 11:

He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
—2 Corinthians 5:21

Session 12:

Each person should do as he has decided in his heart — not reluctantly or out of compulsion, since God loves a cheerful giver.
—2 Corinthians 9:7

Session 13:

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness." Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may reside in me.
—2 Corinthians 12:9

INTRODUCTION TO 1,2 CORINTHIANS

Passionate. Powerful. Purposeful. These three terms are good, comprehensive descriptors of the letters to the Corinthian church. Both letters contain passionate responses to doctrinal and practical matters that needed attention. Each section, chapter, and verse are purposeful by design, addressing those issues with sound theology, keen insight, and gospel-centeredness. Without a doubt, the Corinthian correspondence reveals a powerful presentation of gospel truths and applications, written ably in argument and clarity.

Writer

The apostle Paul is identified as the writer of both letters in their opening verses. Sosthenes is included in the greeting of 1 Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:1), and Timothy, who likely assisted Paul in the transcribing of the letters, is mentioned in the greeting of 2 Corinthians (2 Cor. 1:1).

Destination

Acts 18 recalls the founding of the Corinthian church during Paul's third missionary journey. He spent eighteen months establishing the church before heading on to his next opportunity. Corinth was one of the largest cities in Greece during Paul's day—demonstrating a savvy missiological strategy on Paul's part. The city's location in the region of Achaia made it a crossroads for both land and sea trade, bringing considerable wealth to its citizenship. Corinth was also well-known for its immorality and religious pluralism.

Key Themes

- Key Themes in 1 Corinthians—Christian unity, sexual morality, women's roles, spiritual gifts, and the resurrection.
- Key Themes in 2 Corinthians—Paul's apostolic authority, the new covenant, the intermediate state (believers between the death of the body and the resurrection), sacrificial giving, and condemnation of false teachers.

OUTLINES OF 1,2 CORINTHIANS

1 CORINTHIANS

- I. **Greetings and Thanksgiving (1:1-9)**
- II. **Problems in the Church (1:10–6:20)**
 - A. Disunity (1:10–4:21)
 - B. Immorality Tolerated (5:1–6:20)
- III. **Answers to Questions from the Corinthians (7:1–14:40)**
 - A. Questions About Marriage (7:1-40)
 - B. Limitations of Christian Liberty (8:1–11:1)
 - C. Practices in Public Worship (11:2-16)
 - D. Behavior at the Lord's Supper (11:17-34)
 - E. Exercise of Spiritual Gifts (12:1–14:40)
- IV. **The Resurrection of the Body (15:1-58)**
- V. **Conclusion (16:1-24)**

2 CORINTHIANS

- I. **Special Greetings (1:1-11)**
- II. **Paul's Ministry (1:12–7:16)**
 - A. Paul's Itinerary (1:12–2:13)
 - B. Paul's Message (2:14–5:10)
 - C. Paul's Purpose (5:11–7:16)
- III. **A Collection for Needy Christians (8:1–9:15)**
- IV. **The Case Against False Apostles (10:1–13:10)**
- V. **Final Greetings (13:11-13)**

USING THE DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE

Follower. Adherent. Loyalist. Attached. Allegiant. Zealous. Disciple. Jesus' call is the same to all people: to follow Him as a disciple. He expects more than a courteous nod. He deserves more than intellectual agreement. He calls us to be disciples—growing disciples. How do we do that?

In Brad Waggoner's *Shape of Faith to Come*, he identified the discipline of “daily Bible engagement” as the number-one predictor of a person's spiritual growth. *Daily* implies a discipline much like exercising, brushing teeth, or eating a certain number of calories EVERY day. Should we be any different when it comes to our spiritual training? The focus is the *Bible*, God's Word. There is nothing wrong with knowing the thoughts of great philosophers, leaders, or theologians, but they must not replace God's Word. *Engagement* implies participating in the act of reading, studying, and reflecting. Engagement is active, requiring us to do something.

Your *Daily Discipleship Guide* is full of tools to help you grow as a disciple. But like any tool, you have to use it to get the benefit.

Use this resource when studying with a group. The first five pages of each session help the group leader introduce a Bible passage and move you toward acting on the truths discovered.

Use the **Daily Exploration** pages to go deeper into God's Word, building on your group's study experience. Engage in daily Bible study, record your thoughts, reflect on the questions, and take action.

Use the **Talk It Out** section at the end of each session to hold yourself and others accountable by meeting in a smaller group of same-sex individuals (an accountability group). Share with the smaller group what God has been teaching you through the group time and your personal daily Bible study.

Use the resource every week even when you are unable to attend the group's Bible study. Missing a group Bible study does not excuse you from being engaged daily with God through His Word. Use the *Daily Discipleship Guide* to move forward in your spiritual growth.

Want this resource on your phone or tablet for when you are on the go? Purchase an eBook in the *Explore the Bible* APP (available through GooglePlay and the iTunes Store) or at LifeWay.com.

Getting the Most from TALK IT OUT

Talk It Out, found at the end of each session, supports groups of three or four people who come together weekly to encourage, share, build up, and sharpen each other. While other issues may be addressed, the Talk It Out section provides a few directed questions based on the previous group experience and daily Bible engagement suggestions to start the weekly conversation.

These groups are made up of three to four people...

- Participants should be of the same gender.
- These groups should be smaller on purpose.
- These groups can meet at almost any location.
- These groups can easily accommodate each other's schedules.

...Who meet weekly...

- Life happens weekly, so meeting weekly is important.
- There is nothing like sitting across from friends over coffee, a meal, or dessert.
- In some cases, your smaller group may need to meet using technology that allows for video chats (such as Skype or Google Hangouts).
- You may find it best to meet face-to-face every other week or once a month and use virtual tools the other weeks.

...To hold each other accountable and encourage each other in their spiritual growth.

- Review the questions in Talk It Out.
- You may focus on one question more than others.
- Include time to pray for each other.

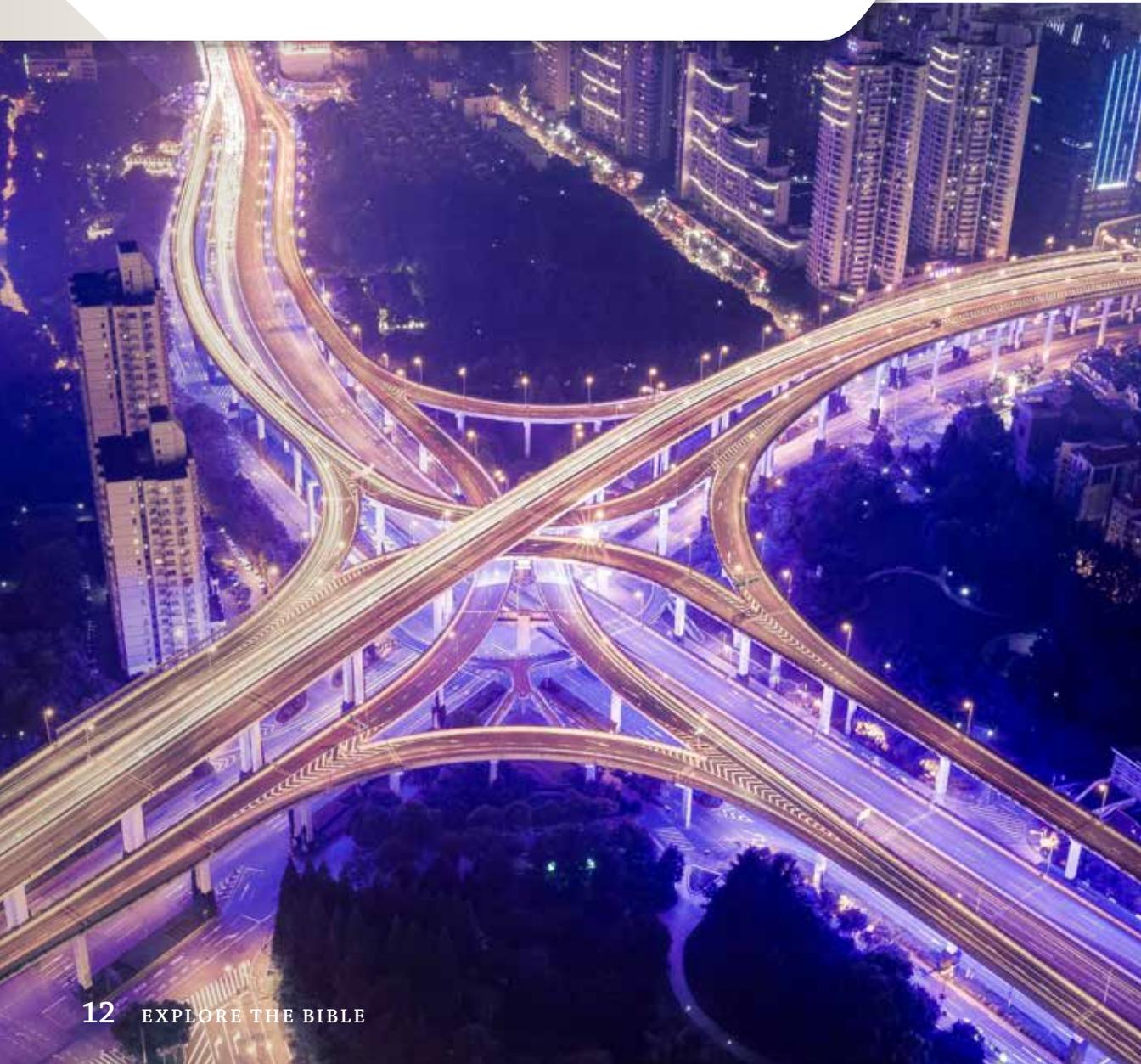


Session 1

United in Christ

All believers share the same salvation and thus should be unified through that confession.

1 Corinthians 1:10-25



Have you been part of a club or organization that was driven by its purpose? How did that purpose help them deal with differences within the group?

A clear purpose keeps some organizations and clubs viable. The organization's purpose unifies people with different backgrounds and opinions. But purpose alone will not keep an organization together; the purpose must be worthy and compelling. A purpose that is bigger than the individual or the needs of the group will more likely unify and sustain a group than a purpose that is reactionary or self-focused.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

The church is a group of people from many different walks of life, backgrounds, and interests that finds its unity in the gospel. At times, divisions occur in the church over many different things—some significant and some trite. Sometimes we let our preferences get in the way of our mission, and believers are unnecessarily divided. In this week's lesson, Paul addressed divisions in the Corinthian church and called the congregation to be united.

Although the church at Corinth had significant problems, Paul was thankful that the grace of God was given to them in Christ Jesus (1:4), and that God called them into fellowship with His Son (1:9). They had been sanctified in Christ and called as saints (1:2), having been enriched in Him in every way (1:5). These truths were important for the Corinthian believers to remember, especially as Paul's stern correction was soon to follow. Paul didn't begin his letter by exposing his readers' laundry list of sins, but rather pointed them back to their true identity in Christ.

Paul also mentioned peace. With all of their divisions and problems, Paul desired for them the kind of peace and wholeness that the gospel provides. Whatever their circumstances or the difficulties between them, God had called them to live in peace.

Early in this letter, however, Paul raised the issue of problems in the church at Corinth. These problems—mostly moral and relational, but some theological—he will address in this letter. He had a fatherly love for this church, which drove him to confront the problems present among her members (4:14-15). In the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians, Paul focused his attention on the disunity that was tearing the church apart.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-25

10 Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our LORD Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, that there be **no divisions among you** **A**, and that you be **united** **B** with the same understanding and the same conviction. **11** For it has been reported to me about you, my brothers and sisters, by members of Chloe’s people, that there is rivalry among you. **12** What I am saying is this: One of you says, “I belong to Paul,” or “I belong to Apollos,” or “I belong to **Cephas** **C**,” or “I belong to Christ.” **13** Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in Paul’s name? **14** I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, **15** so that no one can say you were baptized in my name. **16** I did, in fact, baptize the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don’t recall if I baptized anyone else. **17** For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ will not be emptied of its effect. **18** For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but it is the power of God to us who are **being saved** **D**. **19** For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will set aside the intelligence of the intelligent. **20** Where is the one who is wise? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the debater of this age? Hasn’t God made the world’s wisdom foolish? **21** For since, in God’s wisdom, the world did not know God through wisdom, God was pleased to save those who **believe** **E** through the foolishness of what is preached. **22** For the Jews ask for signs and the Greeks seek wisdom, **23** but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles. **24** Yet to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God, **25** because God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.

Passage Outline

Call For Unity
(1 Cor. 1:10)

Contempt For Divisions
(1 Cor. 1:11-16)

The Cross That Divides
(1 Cor. 1:17-25)

Keywords

- a. A divided church is a weak church. The enemy loves to divide and destroy God’s people (John 10:10).
- b. Unity among God’s people requires courage, conviction, clarity, and speaking God’s “truth in love” (Eph. 4:15).
- c. Aramaic for “Peter” (John 1:42), he was one of Jesus’ inner circle whose ministry was one of grace, forgiveness, and restoration.
- d. Salvation through Christ means justification (have been saved), sanctification (being saved), and glorification (will continue to be saved).
- e. Many know facts about Jesus, but the Lord’s divine mission is to help people become His followers.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

After his introductory comments, Paul jumped right into the serious issue of divisions in the church. Paul called the church to unity in three specific ways. First, they should agree in what they say. Second, there should be no divisions among them. Third, they should have the same understanding and the same conviction. If the Corinthian believers were divided among themselves, the mission and the fruitfulness of the church was in perilous danger, indeed.

What factors could potentially threaten unity in a church? What steps might be taken to ensure that a local church remains unified?

KEY DOCTRINE: The Church. – A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel.

The nature of the rivalry in the Corinthian church is both sad and understandable. It is sad because it was happening at all. But it is understandable because of the personalities at the heart of it. Some were claiming to belong to Paul, some to Apollos, some to Cephas, and some (of the more “spiritual” folks!) to Christ. These men were important leaders connected to the church in Corinth in some way. They each played an influential part in the growth of the believers in Corinth. Ironically, some also claimed to belong to Christ. The truth is, all of the Corinthian believers belonged to Him.

Where do you see this kind of division in the church today? How does rivalry get in the way of God’s work?

For Paul, the word of the cross of Christ was a rallying point and unifier for the church. There should be no disagreement, disunity, or division about that among God’s people. But the cross does divide; it divides those who are perishing from those who are being saved. The cross divides those who depend on the world’s wisdom from those who believe through the foolishness of what is preached about Christ. The same message of the cross that is the unifying call for believers is also a divisive message for those who seek human wisdom and wonders as the highest end.

How is the cross of Christ divisive in our world today? How is it a stumbling block and foolishness for people today?

BIBLE SKILL: Memorize a verse and apply it to a real life situation. – Memorize 1 Corinthians 1:23 in your preferred Bible translation. Then write the verse in your own words. Finally, write a couple of sentences stating how the verse can help you to remember that every person you meet in the coming days needs the gospel.

APPLY THE TEXT

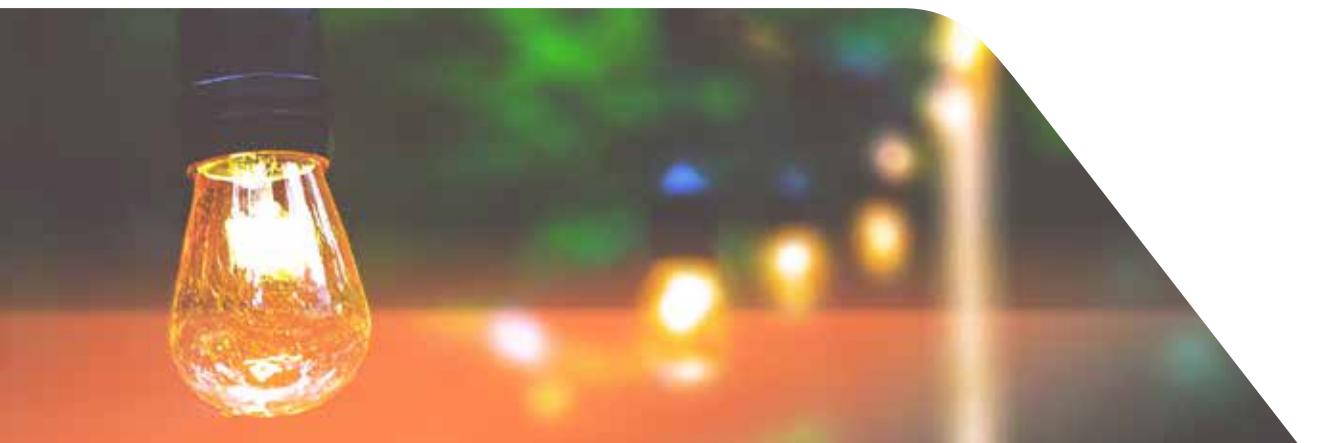
- Believers are to be unified by their confession of Christ.
- Basing allegiances on human personalities leads to prideful boasting and divisions in the church.
- The only dividing line believers should recognize is the division between those who are saved and those who are not.

Consider the relationships you have with other believers, noting those with different backgrounds. How have those relationships strengthened your spiritual life? Thank God for friendships based on a shared Savior.

As a group, determine practical ways you can hold each other accountable to preserve unity and to help each other resist the temptation of forming divisive factions around popular leaders or personalities.

What walls have you built between yourself and other people? Which of those walls get in the way of your building relationships with other believers? What actions do you need to take to begin to remove these walls?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Divisions occur within bodies of believers.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10, underlining the commands in this verse.

Paul made a point to let the Corinthians know that this was a family discussion. After all, he was writing to brothers and sisters and sisters in the Lord. Paul urged them in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Appealing to Jesus was an important move here by Paul. There is no higher authority than our Lord, who Himself prayed that His followers would live in unity with one another (John 17:20-23).

There are several areas of potential division within a church mentioned in 1 Corinthians. The list includes: leaders (1:12–4:21), tolerating immorality in the church (5:1-13), going to secular court against fellow believers (6:1-11), marriage (7:1-40), meat offered to idols (chaps. 8–10), conduct of women in the church (11:1-16), The Lord's Supper (11:17-34), spiritual gifts (chaps. 12–14), Jesus' resurrection (chap. 15).

What factors could potentially threaten unity within your church?

Day 2: Believers should be united through Christ.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10, identifying the three ways Paul is calling the church to unity.

Paul called the church to unity in three specific ways. First, they should agree with one another. There is unity through a common confession of the gospel. That confession is Jesus Christ and Him crucified (2:2). As Paul did in Romans and Ephesians, he laid a doctrinal foundation upon which an ethical life might be built. Paul was calling the believers to doctrinal and theological unity.

Second, there should be no divisions among them. Paul was calling them to relational unity based on their identity in Jesus Christ. This is the core of Paul's message in chapters 1–4. The Corinthian believers were to be united together in Christ, not divided into factions that separated them from one another.

Third, they should be perfectly united in mind and thought. Paul was calling them to missional unity, reminding them that there is no room for disagreement about the nature of the gospel or the mission to be ambassadors of God's reconciling work in Christ (2 Cor. 5:16-21). If the Corinthian believers were divided among themselves, the mission and the fruitfulness of the church was in perilous danger, indeed.

What steps might you take to ensure that your local church remains unified?

Day 3: All believers belong to Christ.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:11-12, noting to whom the people claimed to belong.

Someone informed Paul about quarrels that threatened the church. This report was no idle gossip, but rather a sincere recognition of the danger of division running rampant among members. Some were claiming to follow Paul, some follow Apollos, some follow Cephas, and some (of the more “spiritual” folks!) follow Christ.

First, Paul founded the church in Corinth (see Acts 18:8). Second, Apollos played an instrumental role in the growth of the church (Acts 18:24-27). Third, Cephas was important to some in the Corinthian church. Cephas, also known as Peter, was one of the Twelve and close to Jesus. Cephas, James, and John were “esteemed as pillars” in the church in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:9). Peter was known to be an apostle to the Jews (Gal. 2:7-8), which is likely the reason some in the Corinthian church followed him and claimed to belong to his camp.

Ironically, some also claimed to belong to Christ. The truth is, all of the Corinthian believers belonged to Him. It could be that those who made this claim did so out of genuine theological accuracy, rising above the fray of lesser allegiances and divisions. Or, it could be that they wanted to appear super-spiritual to those who chose to align with Paul, Apollos, or Peter. “Hey, you belong to Apollos? Oh yeah? Well, I belong to Christ. So take that!”

How does rivalry with other Christians get in the way of you doing God’s work?

Day 4: Believers must put Jesus before all other leaders.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:13-15, considering the questions Paul asks.

Paul’s contempt for this rivalry and division is clear in these verses. Paul was thankful he baptized only a handful of people in Corinth. Even though he laid a foundation as a skilled builder for the Corinthian church (3:10), he was not interested in building his own little kingdom. He was an apostle of Jesus, interested in preaching Christ only and Christ sufficient—that Christ’s kingdom might grow flourish.

Some people today take pride in the fact that they were baptized by a well-known pastor, or converted under the ministry of a famous evangelist, or follow the teaching of a respected theologian or leader. More disturbing is the reality that some leaders boast in numbers of people they’ve baptized or ministries they’ve grown. Paul’s verdict? He said the Corinthians should think of him and Apollos as servants of Christ and managers of the mysteries of God (4:1). Nothing more, nothing less. We ought to think of leaders we respect in this way too.

Are there any leaders that you elevate above Christ in your life? How can you continue to respect those leaders but keep Christ first in your life?

Day 5: All believers share the same salvation.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-23, paying close attention to verse 21.

In the Corinthian culture and context, Paul was contending with two objections to the message of the gospel. First, Jews asked for signs. For the Jews, the cross was a bad sign, identified with a curse and not a blessing (Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13). For this reason, the cross is a stumbling block to the Jews; it is a divisive claim on God's behalf. Second, Greeks sought wisdom. Much of Paul's flow of thought in these verses compared the wisdom of the world with the wisdom of God.

So we preach Christ crucified, Paul said. This claim, at its heart, is divisive to the world; but to those whom God has called it is God's wisdom and power. The cross divides because the world seeks its own way, but the only way to God is through His crucified Son.

**How has the cross caused division between you and others?
In what ways has the cross become a stumbling block for your friends and relatives?**

TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in 1 Corinthians 1, sharing with two other members of your Bible study group.

What has God revealed to you about your unity with other believers this week? How does that impact your ability to do God's work in this small group and with your larger church group?

How can you foster unity within the church without compromising the reality of the cross?



For additional context, read "Paul and the Corinthian Church" and "InSites: Corinth: Its History and Contribution" in the Spring 2018 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

Session 2

Glorifying God

Believers honor God through holy living.

1 Corinthians 6:12-20



To what degree do you think it matters how a person uses his or her body? Explain. How would you describe the connection between your body and your spiritual life?

Some people hate their bodies. They see themselves as ugly or fat or too short or too tall or whatever. Some people are proud of their bodies. They work out and are fit. Most of us are probably somewhere in the middle, we neither love our bodies nor loathe them. As long as we are in this life, we are tied to our bodies. We can bring dishonor to our bodies through such things as gluttony or sexual immorality, or we can use our bodies as instruments for good. How we use our bodies matters.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

It's easy to embrace the notion, "What I do with my own body is up to me. It's nobody else's business." In the first century, some of the Corinthian Christians thought similarly. They had come out of lifestyles of physical indulgence, whether in eating or drinking or sexual expression. They supposed that now, as followers of Jesus, everything was still permitted. In this week's lesson we will consider how Paul helped these immature believers come to a better understanding of how their bodies were to be used. No doubt they were surprised to learn that they did not have the right to do with their bodies whatever they wanted. Indeed, their physical bodies did not even belong to them.

After Paul addressed the issue of division in the Corinthian church (1:10–4:21), he turned his focus to another report that reached his ears: sexual immorality in the church. It was the kind of sexual immorality that was not even tolerated among the Gentiles (5:1). A man was sleeping with his stepmother. This notorious case of sexual immorality needed to be confronted.

In 6:1-11, Paul dealt with the problem of lawsuits among believers. Paul had reminded the Corinthian believers that they had every right to judge and evaluate each other since they were members of one another in the body of Christ (5:12). Couldn't issues be resolved amongst themselves? Did they really need to go before worldly people to arbitrate matters between believers? For Paul, this was a shameful thing (6:5) and he redirected them toward humility and selflessness (6:7). In 6:9-11, Paul resumed his exhortation concerning sexual immorality, which set up his comments in this week's Scripture passage (6:12-20).

1 CORINTHIANS 6:12-20

12 “Everything is permissible for me,” but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible for me,” but I will not be mastered by anything.

13 “Food is for the stomach and the stomach for food,” and God will do away with both of them. However, the body is not for **sexual immorality** **A** but for the LORD, and the LORD for the body.

14 God raised up the LORD and will also raise us up by **his power** **B**. **15** Don’t you know that your bodies are a part of Christ’s body? So should I take a part of Christ’s body and make it part of a prostitute? Absolutely not! **16** Don’t you know that anyone joined to a prostitute is one body with her? For Scripture says, The two will become one flesh.

17 But anyone joined to the LORD is one spirit with him. **18** Flee sexual immorality! Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the person who is sexually immoral sins against his own body.

19 Don’t you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, **20** for you were **bought at a price** **C**. So **glorify** **D** God with your body.

Passage Outline

Focused on Christ’s Lordship
(1 Cor. 6:12-14)

Joined With Christ
(1 Cor. 6:15-17)

Bought With a Price
(1 Cor. 6:18-20)

Keywords

- a. The Greek word is *porneia*, meaning adultery, fornication, pornography, and other means of abusing God’s design for sex.
- b. The Greek word is *dunamis*. God is able and capable. “Nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37).
- c. This speaks to the gospel message. Jesus lived a perfect life, died a sacrificial death, and was resurrected. Jesus paid our sin debt in full so that we can live in grace (Isa. 53:1-7).
- d. The Greek word is *doxazo*, from which we get our word *doxology*. The biblical idea is to recognize, honor, and praise. God is to be glorified “everything” we do—with both our physical and spiritual bodies (1 Cor. 10:31).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Paul opened this section of his letter with a quotation, “Everything is permissible for me,” which he used twice in this verse and twice again in 10:23. Biblical scholars are divided on whether Paul was referring to something he himself said, or if this phrase was a slogan from the broader Corinthian culture. Either way, the Corinthian believers had misapplied this phrase, using it to pursue ungodly actions and selfish ends.

What other areas beyond food and sex might master a Christian’s life if left unchecked or unchallenged?

Paul said it really does matter because the body is not for sexual immorality, but for the Lord. Jesus is Lord even over the body, so don’t live like your stomach is god or sexual pleasure is god. Paul’s primary theological justification for claiming that the body matters was rooted in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The fact that God raised Jesus is of paramount importance for the believer. If Jesus has not been raised, then there are bigger problems than what we think about food and sex (1 Cor. 15:1-58). Yet, it does matter how we view food and sex.

What is the relationship between freedom and responsibility? What might be said to believers who think they are free to do as they please?

BIBLE SKILL: Dig deeper into the background and usage of key words and phrases. – The term translated “sexual immorality” (1 Cor. 6:13) is from the Greek term *porneia* (from which our English term “pornography” is derived). Read selected passages from the list below and make notes on how this term is used in the New Testament: Matthew 5:32; 15:19; 19:9; Mark 7:21; John 8:41; Acts 15:20,29; 21:25; Romans 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:1; 6:13,18; 7:2; 2 Corinthians 12:21; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:3.

The bottom line is, you are not your own. Paul had been driving at this the whole time. The body is for the Lord, and the Lord for the body (6:13). Should you join yourself, sexually, to a prostitute? Absolutely not! (6:15) Why? Because you are joined to Christ and you are not your own. Jesus calls the shots. He commands our obedience. He deserves total devotion because of who He is and what He has done for us. We cannot and must not forget to whom we belong. Our bodies belong to Jesus and they are designed to be the place of His presence, on display for all to see.

If we have been purchased by Him, then we belong to Him. If we belong to Him, then He can tell us what to do with what He owns—our bodies. Consider your body as a living sacrifice to God, holy to Him (see Rom. 12:1). We were made for this. We were bought for this.

How does what Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 compare to what he wrote to the Corinthian believers?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers can live holy lives by focusing on Christ's Lordship and not temporal things.
- Believers can have a deep relationship with the Father through faith in Christ.
- Believers can bring glory to God by how they care for and use their bodies.

Examine your focus in life. Are you more focused on Christ or on temporal things? What evidence would you point to in support of your answer? What needs to change and how?

Discuss as a group ways of holding one another accountable for using your body to honor God. How can the group hold one another accountable without judging, condoning, or ignoring?

Ask God to reveal to you areas of your life where you are misusing your body. Confess them to God and repent. What steps do you need to take to make sure you honor Christ in all areas of your life?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Not all things that are permissible are beneficial.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:12, considering what it means for something to be beneficial.

Freedom in Christ was a key theological theme for Paul (see also Gal. 5:1). Freedom in Christ is never a license to sin. That's a misunderstanding of grace and of the gospel.

Paul added a couple qualifiers to the idea of permissibility and freedom for believers. First, he claimed that not all things are helpful. You might be free to pursue some things as a Christian and not sin; however, that doesn't mean you should. Paul applied that concept to whether the Corinthian believers should eat food sacrificed to idols (see 8:1-13). They were free to eat if their consciences were clear about it, but it would not be beneficial (in fact, it would be damaging) to eat if a fellow Christian stumbled because of it. Paul said he'd never again eat meat and that he'd prefer his brother in Christ over his own freedom (8:13).

Second, Paul would not be dominated by anything. Nothing else was to control the Corinthian believers or master them—only Jesus. Sadly, many of Paul's readers were being mastered by their selfish desires, especially concerning food and sex. If Christ is Lord, then He has authority to tell us how we are to handle our desires for food and sex.

What areas might master your life if left unchecked or unchallenged?

Day 2: Our bodies are for the Lord.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:13-14, noting what is for the Lord.

Paul quoted another slogan, "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food," likely dealing with a distorted view of the body held by some Corinthian believers. This slogan probably did arise from the broader culture, and some had adopted it in the church. Paul's simple exhortation was that God will destroy both one and the other.

Again, Paul corrected their faulty understanding of the body. They thought, "If the body is going to be destroyed, then what does it matter?" Paul said it really does matter because the body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord.

Just as Jesus was resurrected bodily, we too await the redemption of our bodies in a glorious resurrection to come (1 Cor. 15; 1 Thess. 4:13-18). The bottom line is that the body matters, and what you do with it matters, because Jesus is Lord.

Do you think you are free to do as you please or is there some responsibility required in how you treat your body? How do you think Paul would answer that question?

Day 3: We must hold each other accountable.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:15, paying attention to how Paul relates our bodies to Christ's body.

When we are saved, a vital union is formed between us and the Lord. Jesus promised this oneness, describing the relationship analogously as a vine and branches, showing the organic and vital union between the two (John 15). He also said that He and the Father would come and make their home in us through the Holy Spirit and emphasized how He is in us and we are in Him (John 14:20).

Once again, Paul offered a justification for why it matters how a believer handles his or her body sexually. It matters because we belong to Christ; it matters because we are vitally a part of Christ's body, the church. As members of the church, there is accountability to one another for how we behave, which is why Paul commanded stern discipline for the notorious sexual immorality in 5:1-13. In this current verse, Paul's outrage toward taking a part of Christ's body and making it a part of a prostitute is clear. Should something like this be allowed? Should it be "permissible"? Never!

Do you bristle at the thought of accountability with another person? Explain. How does being held accountable by others help you use your freedom for good?

Day 4: The joining of bodies should be reserved for marriage.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:16, underlining the last phrase.

Some Corinthian believers apparently had no problem with using a temple prostitute. But again, sex is no mere bodily function without significance or consequence. In fact, Paul said he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her. Why would one who is joined with Christ as part of His body be joined to a prostitute and become one with her body? Such a thing is unthinkable!

Quoting Genesis 2:24, Paul reminded them that in a sexual union, the two become one flesh. The sexual union is reserved for marriage alone, between one man and one woman. Using temple prostitutes for sexual gratification may have been common in the culture, but for the Corinthian believers, it was off-limits because they had been joined with Christ.

How should being united with Christ impact how you view what you do with your body?

Day 5: Sexual immorality does not honor Christ.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:18, identifying the command.

Paul minced no words: Flee from sexual immorality. There should be no hint of sexual immorality among those in the church (see Eph. 5:3). Run if you have to, literally, like Joseph did when Potiphar's wife made sexual advances toward him (Gen. 39).

Every other sin a person commits is outside the body is a difficult phrase to understand. What does the body refer to here? Is it the physical body or the body of Christ? Paul added that the sexually immoral person sins against his own body, raising additional issues.

Perhaps Paul was saying that sexual sin is unique and damaging in a way that other sins are not. Certainly, the consequences for an individual are lasting in ways that are unique compared to other sins (unplanned pregnancies, diseases, etc.). But in context, Paul was likely saying that the bodily union of sexual immorality is incongruent with union to Christ (6:15). To sin sexually is to defile the temple of the Holy Spirit.

How does the way you treat your body and the bodies of others serve as a means of honoring or dishonoring God?

TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in 1 Corinthians 6, sharing with two other members of your Bible study group.

How has God opened your eyes this week? Consider how an accountability partner could help you follow in God's will for your life.

In what ways can you choose to honor Christ with your body? Are you currently treating your body as His temple? What changes might you need to make?



For additional context, read "Sexual Ethics: Paul's Challenge to the Corinthians" in the Spring 2018 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

Session 3

Keeping Commitments

Believers honor God by keeping their vows related to marriage and purity.

1 Corinthians 7:1-13



**What are the main challenges people face today regarding marriage?
How important is it for them to think of marriage as a lifetime commitment?**

Marriage is hard. Both husband and wife must commit to each other. The relationship must be fostered and guarded. The lack of biblical standards in society adds to the challenge. It seems that much more attention is given to redefining marriage than to upholding God's design for His creation, cluttering the conversation and commitment needed to make biblical marriage work.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Paul was not yet finished dealing with sexual immorality and related issues. His discussion in this chapter flows from what he wrote and argued in chapters 5–6, but the immediate connection is to the final section of chapter 6 (vv. 12-20), where he dealt with the relationship between sexual immorality and the body.

Paul was taking the opportunity to offer a response to the matters they asked him about (7:1). Having dealt with the negative aspects of sexual immorality, Paul now provided constructive, positive advice to help the Corinthian believers know how to glorify God with their bodies (6:20), whether they were married, single, or widowed. Likely, they asked Paul some specifics related to sex in general, marriage, singleness and more. This chapter addresses those areas.

One of the main principles Paul conveyed to the Corinthian believers in this chapter is this that each person is to remain in the situation in which he or she was called (7:24). This principle is repeated three times in verses 17-24 and directs the entire discussion of the chapter. Perhaps some Corinthian believers assumed that Paul's teaching on being a new creation in Christ, in which the old has passed away and the new has come (2 Cor. 5:17), meant that even marital relations were to cease and change. Maybe this was a part of the matters they asked about. Regardless, Paul's counsel was for them to stay in the situation they were in when God called them to salvation.

1 CORINTHIANS 7:1-13

1 Now in response to the matters you wrote about: “It is good for a man not to use a woman for sex.”

2 But because sexual immorality is so common, each man should have sexual relations **with his own wife** **A**, and each woman should have sexual relations with her own husband. **3** A husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise a wife to her husband. **4** A wife does not have the right over her own body, but her husband does. In the same way, a husband does not have the right over his own body, but his wife does. **5** Do not deprive one another — except when you agree for a time, to devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again; otherwise, Satan may tempt you because of your lack of self-control. **6** I say this as a concession, not as a command. **7** I wish that all people were as I am. But each has his own gift from God, one person has this gift, another has that.

8 I say to the unmarried and to widows: It is good for them if they remain as I am. **9** But if they do not have self-control, they **should marry** **B**, since it is better to marry than to burn with desire. **10** To the married I give this command— not I, but the LORD — a wife is not to leave her husband. **11** But if she does leave, she must remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband — and a husband is not to divorce his wife. **12** But **I** **C** (not the LORD) say to the rest: If any brother has an unbelieving wife and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. **13** Also, if any woman has an unbelieving husband and he is willing to live with her **she must not divorce her husband** **D**.

Passage Outline

Marriage and Intimacy
(1 Cor. 7:1-7)

Marriage and Singleness
(1 Cor. 7:8-9)

Marriage and Divorce
(1 Cor. 7:10-13)

Keywords

- a. Paul appealed for sexual activity to be expressed in its biblical context of marital fidelity.
- b. The biblical idea is “to wed.” God’s design for marriage is for a man and woman to join their lives together for life (Mark 10:9).
- c. Paul shared his heart, establishing moral boundaries for the church. Paul’s words carried theological weight among believers in Corinth.
- d. God “hates divorce” (Mal. 2:16, AMP). The church needs to help rescue broken marriages. Broken marriages lead to broken families; broken families lead to broken churches; and broken churches lead to broken nations. Religious differences aren’t biblical grounds for divorce.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

The reality Paul had to confront was that sexual immorality was common in the culture of Corinth. Paul said there was an appropriate way to handle this problem. This answer should not surprise his readers (nor us), since this teaching is grounded in God's design at creation. God established the institution of marriage between a husband and wife (Gen. 1-2).

Just as our bodies are a part of Christ's body (1 Cor. 6:15), so also in marriage our bodies are part of each other. We belong to Christ, joined spiritually with Him, but we also belong to our spouse, joined bodily with him or her. So, the rights now belong to the spouse when it comes to sexual relations and sexual fulfillment.

How does this teaching of duty and rights in marriage contrast with contemporary views about marital relationships? What corrections need to be made for a healthy view of sex within marriage? What are some implications to be avoided?

Paul told the Corinthian believers there are only two reasons to refrain from providing sexual fulfillment to their spouse. Sometimes there needs to be intense or intentional spiritual focus, and regular marital duties will have to wait. Yes, there are tensions and temptations and trials that marriage brings to individuals, but a spouse is truly a gift from the Lord.

How can married couples view their status as a gift? How can singles view their status as a gift? What ways can each group of believers encourage one another in their respective status?

BIBLE SKILL: Use other Scripture to help understand a Bible passage. –

1 Corinthians 7 is far from the complete biblical teaching on marriage. Read Genesis 2:18-25 and Matthew 19:1-6 regarding the normality and permanence of marriage. Read Matthew 5:32; 19:7-11; and 1 Corinthians 7:10-16 regarding divorce (and the possibility of remarriage). Summarize the biblical teaching regarding God's intention for marriage. Summarize in your own words the biblical teaching regarding divorce and remarriage.

Paul knew that singleness has challenges of its own. Paul's concern for singles was that they would not be able to exercise self-control and would burn with passion. If this is the case, by all means, Paul said, they should marry. Only in the embrace of one's husband or wife is it appropriate to find sexual satisfaction. It is better to marry and be holy in God's sight rather than sin through sexual immorality (see 1 Thess. 4:3-5).

For those who are married, Paul's counsel was for them to stay that way. This command comes not from Paul but the Lord. The Lord has spoken on the matter of divorce (Mark 10:1-12; Matt. 19:1-12). Paul restated the Lord's teaching here.

What does this passage teach us about the mutual commitment within a marriage?

APPLY THE TEXT

- God created marriage and commanded that sex was to remain within the context of marriage.
- Believers are to be content regardless of marital status.
- Believers are to guard and uphold the sanctity of marriage between a man and a woman.

Regardless of your marital status, what are you doing to make sure your sexual expression honors God and His design for creation? How can you help others understand God’s expectations?

What are you doing to make sure your identity continues to be found in Christ and not simply in your earthly relationships?

Discuss ways your Bible study group can uphold the sanctity of marriage between a man and woman. What actions can be taken to support those who are married, married but struggling, single, and single-again?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: God has a plan for sex.

Read 1 Corinthians 7:1, noting your initial thoughts on this statement.

Responding to some issues the Corinthian believers wrote about, Paul's reply was: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." This statement is challenging on a couple of levels. It is unclear whether or not this was Paul's own view or if he was quoting something they said when they wrote him. On this difficulty, biblical scholars are divided. Either way, the quotation allowed Paul to teach the Corinthians more about a proper understanding of sex and relationships, which he was willing to do.

Another challenging aspect for this statement is its meaning. A comparison of Bible translations shows the difficulty. Does it mean "not to touch a woman," which is the literal Greek here (although all recognize this is a euphemism for sexual relations)? Does it mean "not to marry" or "not to have sexual relations with a woman" at all? The statement points back to Paul's earlier discussion of a man sleeping with his stepmother (1 Cor. 5:1) and of having sex with a prostitute (1 Cor. 6:15-16), but also points ahead to how sex is to function within the marital duties between a husband and wife (7:2-4). Perhaps Paul was simply saying that sex is more than just pleasure, so don't view another person as merely a sex object to use selfishly.

How does this teaching of duty and rights in marriage contrast with your views about marital relationships? What do you need to adjust to be in line with the biblical view of marital relationships?

Day 2: Sex within marriage requires fulfilling marital duties for your spouse.

Read 1 Corinthians 7:3-4, considering the role of both the husband and the wife.

A clear implication arising from God's design is that husbands and wives have marital duties to fulfill for each other. The language Paul used here is one of debt and repayment, showing that sexual fulfillment in marriage is not dependent upon how one "feels" toward the other but rather upon the nature of the relationship itself—a covenant agreement with obligations for each party.

Strikingly, Paul's instruction calls for mutuality and equality with respect to this obligation. By ancient standards, women had lesser rights and different obligations than did men. But Paul's exhortation was revolutionary. In fact, he confronted this cultural disposition by calling first for the husband to give to his wife her conjugal rights then the wife to her husband.

What corrections do you need to make to have a healthy view of sex within marriage? What are some implications to be avoided?

Day 3: Sex within marriage is a gift that should not be withheld.

Read 1 Corinthians 7:5-7, circling the word gift.

Because there is a marital duty to fulfill, and because each spouse's body belongs to the other by rights, Paul said, Do not deprive one another. It's one thing to make a case for sex being reserved for married couples only. It is another thing altogether for married couples to fulfill their marital duties to each other—consistently and happily—to help each other have self-control and walk in holiness.

Sadly, some use sex wrongly in marriage, forgetting the “duty” and “rights” discussion. Instead, withholding sex from each other becomes a weapon. It should not be this way. Paul said if we deprive one another we actually put our spouse in danger of temptation by Satan because of lack of self-control. Each person is responsible for how he or she handles that temptation, but the point is that we are stronger—under better control of ourselves—if we are satisfied sexually by our spouse.

How can you view your marital status as a gift? How can you encourage those with a different marital status?

Day 4: Unmarried believers should be content to remain single.

Read 1 Corinthians 7:8, identifying Paul's wish.

Paul continued the thought he started in verse 7 concerning his wish that all were unmarried like him. He specifically turned his focus to the unmarried and the widows. Again, Paul's larger principle about remaining in the situation they were in when God called them comes to light here. Paul said, it is good for them to remain single, as I am. It is appropriate and beneficial to stay single and not seek marriage.

Later in this chapter, Paul stated that singleness allows believers to be without concerns common to married life in order to be devoted to the Lord without distraction (vv. 32-35). Since the time is limited (v. 29) and the work is massive, it is better for the kingdom if they remain single and serve the Lord unhindered. This point is critical to Paul's argument in the rest of the chapter. But in this verse, he was satisfied to say only, it is good for them to remain single, as I am.

Assess your agreement with the following: “Believers are to be content regardless of marital status.” How does this statement summarize Paul's point? What is the relationship between what Paul was teaching and God's expectation of His people living in a God-honoring way?

Day 5: Divorce must be avoided.

Read 1 Corinthians 7:12-13, noting Paul's words on divorce.

Paul made it clear that the following counsel was from him, not the Lord. The apostle was not saying his words lack authority, or were merely his own opinion, but rather that the Lord Himself never taught specifically about marriage and divorce concerning an unbelieving spouse.

To the Corinthian believer who is married to an unbeliever, he should not divorce her. The same applies for a believing woman: she should not divorce him. If the unbelieving spouse is willing to live with his or her believing spouse, then there are no grounds for separation. Perhaps by remaining together the believing spouse might actually win the unbelieving spouse to the Lord (see v. 16).

If, however, the unbelieving spouse leaves, a brother or sister is not bound in such cases. If the unbelieving is not peaceable and wants to leave, so be it.

How does this passage help you understand how to relate to people who were married prior to accepting Christ?

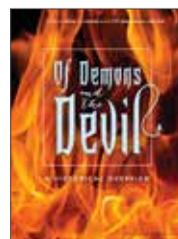


TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in 1 Corinthians 7, sharing with two other members of your Bible study group.

Consider your own marital status. How do these verses address issues within your own life?

What principles about marriage have you discovered this week? How has that impacted how you relate to your spouse? To others?



For additional context, read “Of Demons and the Devil: A Historical Overview” and “Letter Writing in the First Century” in the Spring 2018 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

Session 4

Influencing for Christ

Believers represent God by using their influence to bring others to Him.

1 Corinthians 9:19-27; 10:31-33; 11:1



What living person has had the most positive influence in your life? Has anyone had a negative influence? Who have you had the most influence on, for better or worse?

Each day we encounter people who try to influence us. Some do so on purpose while others do it simply by being who they are. Every person we encounter may be influenced by us as well. We never know the impact of our life's influence on someone else, nor what that influence will yield beyond our reach.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Our Scripture passage this week brings into clearer focus the stewardship of influence. How we live before others really does matter. Paul's concern for the Corinthians was that they underestimated their influence in bringing others to Christ. Rather than living in self-focused ways, Paul challenged his readers (and us) to run the race in the right way, with the right goals in mind. Let's consider how to adorn—and not hinder—the gospel of Christ with our lives.

Paul's letter to the Corinthian believers addressed a few matters they asked about in a letter to him (1 Cor. 7:1). He already tackled divisions in the church (chaps. 1–4), issues regarding sexual immorality (chaps. 5–6), and marriage and singleness (chap. 7). In chapters 8–10, Paul focused his attention on another question posed to him by the Corinthian church: Was it appropriate for believers to eat food sacrificed to idols?

The issue was deeper than just eating food. It was an issue of understanding the nature of Christian liberty and the priority of love over selfish gain. The brothers or sisters for whom Christ died are much more important than the freedom to eat food sacrificed to idols (8:11).

The stewardship of influence was important to Paul. One's influence on a brother or sister in Christ to either help them or harm them is worthy of deep consideration and application. One's influence on unbelievers for the sake of the gospel must not be underestimated either. In chapter 9, Paul specifically expanded on this idea. Finally, Paul used ancient Israel as a negative example for what falling into idolatry can produce (10:1-12). Today's lesson will consider how believers represent the Lord by using their influence to bring others to him.

1 CORINTHIANS 9:19-27; 10:31-33; 11:1

9:19 Although I am free from all and not anyone's slave, I have made myself a slave to everyone, in order to **win** **A** more people. **20** To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win Jews; to those **under the law** **B**, like one under the law — though I myself am not under the law — to win those under the law.

21 To those who are without the law, like one without the law — though I am not without God's law but under the law of Christ — to win those without the law. **22** To the weak I became weak, in order to win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that I may by every possible means save some. **23** Now I do all this **because of the gospel** **C**, so that I may share in the blessings.

24 Don't you know that the runners in a stadium all race, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way to win the prize. **25** Now everyone who competes exercises self-control in everything. They do it to receive a perishable crown, but we **an imperishable crown** **D**. **26** So I do not run like one who runs aimlessly or box like one beating the air.

27 Instead, I discipline my body and bring it under strict control, so that after preaching to others, I myself will not be disqualified. **10:31** So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. **32** Give no offense to Jews or Greeks or the church of God, **33** just as I also try to please everyone in everything, not seeking my own benefit, but the benefit of many, so that they may be saved. **11:1** Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ.

Passage Outline

Walking In Their Shoes
(1 Cor. 9:19-23)

Running In the Race
(1 Cor. 9:24-27)

Following Our Leader
(1 Cor. 10:31-33; 11:1)

Keywords

- a. "Gain" (KJV). Paul longed to reach more unbelievers, seeing them turn from sin to trust Christ. Jesus is the One who saves.
- b. The entire collection of the sacred books of the Old Testament. Paul preached that salvation was by God's grace, not by observing the law.
- c. The gospel is good news. Jesus left heaven, came to this earth, lived a sinless life, died a sacrificial death, rose from the dead, and calls His people to surrender all.
- d. This crown is eternal. Rewards await the believer who runs and builds God's way (1 Cor. 3:12-15). Imperishable crowns will be placed at the feet of Jesus (Rev. 4:10).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Some believers in Corinth were using their freedom in Christ as an opportunity to please themselves rather than to serve others in love. Paul could have demanded his rights as an apostle and expected the Corinthians to serve him, but he didn't (see vv. 3-15). For Paul, demanding his rights was counter-gospel and would actually hinder the gospel of Christ

Paul's calling from Christ was to take the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). His goal was to win as many as possible for Christ. Paul also sought to win the weak. The overall context of 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1 suggests that the weak were believers in danger of having their consciences defiled by those exercising their freedom in Christ to eat meat sacrificed to idols.

How can a believer contextualize the gospel without compromising the gospel? What principles can be found in this passage for establishing a proper line?

Running and racing were among Paul's favorite metaphors. Paul's emphasis here was on how to run the race. It takes effort and discipline. Paul is making an important point: Live a self-controlled Christian life, at maximum effort, in order to be an influential witness for Christ among all people. We run our race for Christ, to win an imperishable crown.

BIBLE SKILL: Use multiple Scripture passages to understand a major

doctrine. – The term translated “crown” (stephanos) in the original language of 9:25, referred to a victor's crown rather than a king's crown (diadema). Review 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 2 Timothy 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:4; and Revelation 2:10 for other passages in which believers' rewards are described as a stephanos. How can you relate these passages to this week's lesson?

Paul wanted to run in such a way to win others, to win the race, to win the prize—and that's why he kept himself under control, so he didn't lose out on the blessings of those things.

How does living a disciplined lifestyle reflect God's character? What methods might a person use to stay focused on pleasing God?

Paul's first command was to do all to the glory of God. Our actions and desires should not be to please ourselves; instead, everything we do is ultimately for the purpose of bringing glory to God. Paul's second command was to give no offense. Following Paul's example, we should not seek our own benefit, but that of many. Paul's final command to imitate him pointed to a greater reality: as I am of Christ. Paul's example is faithful and worthy of imitation since he himself was imitating Christ.

What are some practical ways of living out this passage? How can a person honor God in all things with humility?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers are to do all they can to seek to win others to Christ without compromising the gospel.
- Believers are to live their lives with discipline, striving to receive commendation from the Father.
- Believers are to live as Christian examples of what it means to follow Christ.

As a group, discuss areas of Christian liberty that might influence fellow believers and also unbelievers. What principles from this passage does your group need to incorporate and how?

Where has God given you influence over others? How can you make a greater investment in that stewardship of influence?

List a few people who have had an influence on your spiritual life. What qualities influenced you the most? What specific ways did their actions affect you? What do you need to do to have a greater influence on others for the sake of the gospel?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Serve others in love.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:19, consider why Paul was willing to be a slave to everyone.

Some believers in Corinth were using their freedom in Christ as an opportunity to please themselves rather than to serve others in love. Using himself as an example, Paul said, though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all. He could have demanded to be served, but he didn't (see vv. 3-15). Why not? Because his reward was in preaching the gospel, offering it free of charge, not as a good exchanged for compensation (vv. 17-18). Paul's approach was explicitly Christlike (see Mark 10:45; Phil. 2:5-8). For Paul, demanding his rights was counter-gospel and would actually hinder the gospel of Christ (v. 12). So he laid down his rights and took up the mantle of Christ as a servant.

The reason Paul made himself the slave of all was that I might win more of them. The original language simply says "in order to gain more." He didn't mean personal gain for his benefit; he meant gaining people. The verses to follow make this point clear. Paul's gain was more people being saved.

What might making yourself a servant to all in order to win more people look like in today's culture?

Day 2: Relate to unbelievers when sharing the gospel.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:20-23, noting how Paul became like his audience.

Several groups are identified as part of Paul's missionary strategy. He intentionally approached Jews first. The gospel, after all, is the power of God for salvation "first to the Jew" (Rom. 1:16). His goal was to win Jews for the sake of the gospel, although he himself no longer viewed his ethnicity as advantageous with respect to God (Phil. 3:7-9). It is unclear whether or not those under the law were distinct from the Jews just mentioned. Paul's conversion to Christ meant breaking from his religious past, especially from trying to keep the law as a means of salvation. Paul was not under the law, nor are any who belong to Christ. They are now under grace (Rom. 6:14-15).

Paul related to Gentiles to win those without the law. After all, Paul's calling from Christ was to take the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). Lastly, Paul sought to win the weak — believers in danger of having their consciences defiled by those exercising their freedom in Christ to eat meat sacrificed to idols. Paul was thinking strategically about the mission—more believers, more partnerships in the gospel, more support, and thus, the gospel to more people.

How can you contextualize the gospel without compromising the gospel?

Day 3: Discipline is required to win the prize.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, identifying the racing metaphors.

Running and racing were among Paul's favorite metaphors. He used athletic metaphors in most of his letters (1 Cor. 15:32; Phil. 2:16; 3:13-14; 1 Thess. 2:2; 1 Tim. 1:18; 4:7; 2 Tim. 2:5; 4:7). His use of runners was savvy, indeed, since Corinth hosted the Isthmian Games, similar to the famous Olympic games in Greece.

Paul's main point was this: So run that you may obtain the prize. Although in other contexts Paul focused on the prize itself (see Phil. 3:12-14), here his emphasis was on how to run the race. Of course, one doesn't just show up to an Olympic event and expect to compete and win without significant training and personal sacrifice.

Paul underscored his argument by insisting that self-control and discipline are what make the difference. When we run, it's not aimlessly like someone who has no understanding of what it takes to reach the finish line. Likewise, we don't box as one beating the air; rather, we have a target and an objective. We know the prize that lies before us, but it will take directed effort and self-control to reach it.

How does living a disciplined lifestyle reflect God's character? What methods might you use to stay focused on pleasing God?

Day 4: Do everything for the glory of God.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:31, highlighting the verse.

After demonstrating Israel's failure to control their desires and idolatrous ways (10:1-22), Paul concluded his extended argument on Christian liberty. What he began in 6:12 he completed in 10:23. His summary conclusion? No one is to seek his own good, but the good of the other person (10:24).

Paul's command is both specific and exhaustive. He said whether you eat or drink, referring to his overall discussion about food sacrificed to idols, eat and drink for God's glory. But he also said that whatever you do, do it for God's glory. We cannot limit this discussion to food and drink because all of life is meant to bring God glory. Live by this gospel-centered, God-honoring, decision-making ethic: do all to the glory of God.

What are some practical ways you can live out this passage? How can you honor God in all things with humility?

Day 5: Be an example to win others to Christ.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:32-33; 11:1, circling the word saved.

Paul once again summarized his larger argument about preferring others before ourselves. Do we have freedom? Absolutely. Paul said, “why should my liberty be determined by someone else’s conscience?” (10:29) Even so, he concluded, I try to please everyone in everything I do. If my freedom causes offense to someone else, then I shouldn’t exercise that freedom. Following Paul’s example, we should not seek our own benefit, but that of many.

Paul’s last command was to be imitators of me. He was exhorting his readers and us to follow him and his example of glorifying God. Paul was not thinking of himself more highly than he ought. Rather, his command to imitate him pointed to a greater reality: as I am of Christ. Paul’s example is faithful and worthy of imitation since he himself was imitating Christ.

What would be the ramifications of placing yourself in a position to be an example for all to see? Why might you shy away from being looked at as an example to follow?

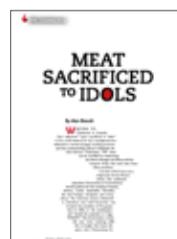
TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in 1 Corinthians 9; 10; and 11, sharing with two other members of your Bible study group.

As you share about Christ with others this week, how can you follow Paul’s example of influencing people to win them for Christ?

Reflect on the racing metaphor Paul used. What is the ultimate prize you are racing toward? What disciplines can you focus on to help you attain that prize?

What would your church be like if everyone patterned their life after ours? What do we need to do to improve our example?



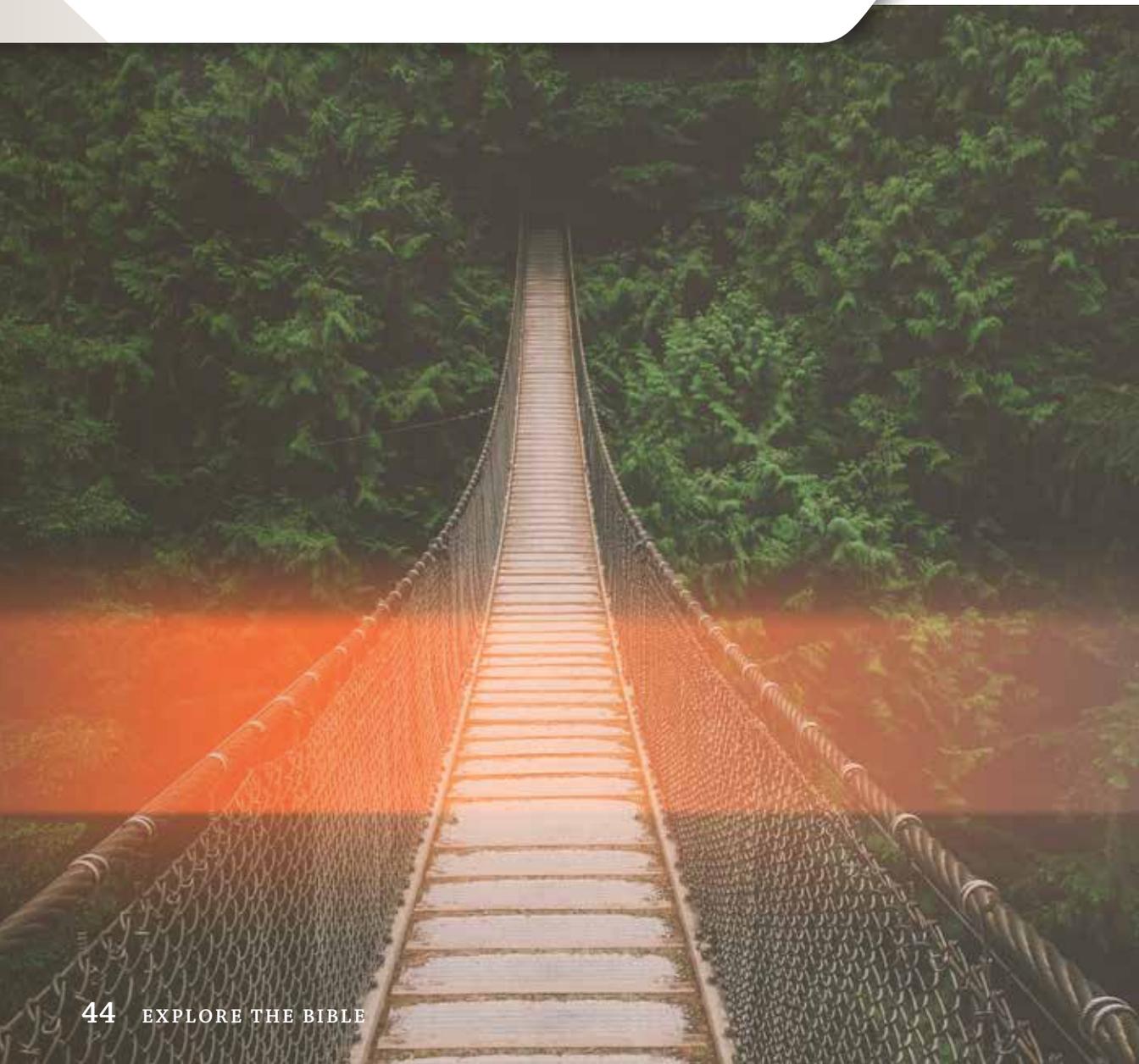
For additional context, read “Meat Sacrificed to Idols” in the Spring 2018 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

Session 5

Assurance of the Resurrection

Believers find assurance for this life and the life to come through the resurrected Lord.

John 20:3-9; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28



Do you feel safer or less safe than you did ten years ago? Explain. How is a person's sense of security related to what one is willing to trust for that security?

Life in the twenty-first century has proven to be anything but secure. Extremist attacks, escalating violence, and racial tensions have put many of us on edge. Many perceive life today to be more advanced than any time in history, yet we also seem to be more determined to find ways of using those advances in destructive ways.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

In some ways, life in the first century was like our own. Various groups in society did not trust one another. The Roman army was often brutal. Justice was meted out by corrupt rulers. Life was not safe and secure for first-century Christians. There was not much that anyone could really be certain of. In other words, human nature has been remarkably consistent when it comes to exploiting others.

Paul was well aware that life is unfair and that little if anything in this life is guaranteed. That's why he placed all his confidence in the resurrection of Jesus. In the resurrection, he found a sure foundation for this life and for the life to come. He expressed this hope in terms of the future resurrection of those who have believed in Jesus. In particular, he wanted believers in Corinth to understand the crucial connection between Jesus' resurrection and the coming resurrection of all those united with the Lord Jesus.

John's narrative of the resurrection is one of four Gospel accounts of the same event (Matt 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12). The four Gospel writers have much in common, yet there are some interesting differences between these narratives, as they include or leave out details from the others and emphasize certain things differently for their respective readers. Thankfully, the Lord provided multiple accounts of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to strengthen the witness of the gospel. The empty tomb and the resurrected Jesus is the foundation upon which our faith is built.

Arguably the most important defense of the resurrection in the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 15 reminds believers of the truth of the resurrection of Jesus and its benefits for those who belong to Christ. The resurrection of Jesus grounds our faith, undergirds our mission, and establishes our hope in the life to come.

JOHN 20:2-9; 1 CORINTHIANS 15:20-28

John 20:2 So **she** **A** went running to Simon Peter and to **the other disciple** **B**, the one Jesus loved, and said to them, “They’ve taken the LORD out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they’ve put him!” **3** At that, Peter and the other disciple went out, heading for the tomb. **4** The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and got to the tomb first. **5** Stooping down, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. **6** Then, following him, Simon Peter also came. He entered the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there. **7** The wrapping that had been on his head was not lying with the linen cloths but was **folded up** **C** in a separate place by itself. **8** The other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, then also went in, saw, and believed. **9** For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he must rise from the dead.

1 Cor. 15:20 But as it is, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have **fallen asleep** **D**.

21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man. **22** For just as in Adam all **die** **E**, so also in Christ all will be **made alive** **F**. **23** But each in his own order: Christ, the firstfruits; afterward, at his coming, those who belong to Christ. **24** Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, when he abolishes all rule and all authority and power. **25** For he must reign until he puts all his enemies under his feet. **26** The last enemy to be abolished is death. **27** For God has put everything under his feet. Now when it says “everything” is put under him, it is obvious that he who puts everything under him is the exception. **28** When everything is subject to Christ, then the Son himself will also be subject to the one who subjected everything to him, so that God may be all in all.

Passage Outline

Believing In the Resurrection (John 20:3-9)

Made Alive Through the Resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20-22)

Future Found In the Resurrection (1 Cor. 15:23-28)

Keywords

- Mary Magdalene. She lived in the town of Magdala on the coast of the Sea of Galilee.
- The apostle John was a fisherman (Matt. 4:18-22) and the author of the Gospel of John; 1, 2, and 3 John; and Revelation.
- The folding of Jesus’ grave cloths indicates the absence of haste and struggle.
- Paul referenced believers who are in the grave. Jesus defeated death (John 11:11; 1 Thess. 4:13).
- As descendants of Adam, our physical nature will pass away.
- The idea is raising the dead to life. Our spiritual nature is made alive in Christ. Salvation transforms a person from being dead to being alive in Christ.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Jumping right into the narrative, we read that John (the other disciple) and Peter were going toward the tomb. They were running together to get there as quickly as possible. The news they had received from Mary was startling and troubling, and it could not be overlooked: “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him” (John 20:2). John took a quick peek in the tomb but did not go in. But Peter, trailing John a little in the footrace, went right in when he got there. The linen cloths are prominent in this narrative. Peter and John saw them lying there, seemingly where Jesus’ body would’ve been lying.

How do the details included by John give credence to his account of Jesus’ resurrection?

John followed Peter into the tomb, saw and believed. But what did John believe? Based on John’s use of “believe” elsewhere in this chapter and in his Gospel as a whole, it is more likely that he believed Jesus had actually risen.

What is the connection between seeing and believing? How can a person believe in Jesus without fully understanding?

BIBLE SKILL: Use a concordance and/or Bible dictionary (either print or on the Internet) to learn more about a feature of Israel’s religious life. –

Use a concordance to find references to “firstfruits” in Scripture. What were the circumstances and regulations for offering firstfruits in the Old Testament? Identify how the New Testament writers took the Old Testament usage and adapted it to apply to believers.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ has massive implications. But the implications flow from the truth and reality of what happened: Christ has been raised from the dead. If Christ has not been raised from the dead, our faith and preaching are in vain (v. 14), we are still in our sins (v. 17), and there is no hope for those who have already died in faith (vv. 18-19). How could Paul be so certain of Jesus’ resurrection? He was certain because the Scriptures said it would happen, and he himself saw the risen Jesus, along with many other eyewitnesses.

What do verses 20-22 reveal about the results of Jesus’ resurrection?

Paul reminded the Corinthian believers not only of participation in a future bodily resurrection but also participation in the eternal reign of God’s kingdom in Christ. Then comes the end ought to be triumphant words of great encouragement to us! When Christ returns, the culmination of God’s redemptive plan will be brought with Him.

How does the promised return of Christ give strength when facing challenges in this life? How can believers demonstrate the hope they have in Christ?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Salvation comes through believing in the resurrected Christ.
- Believers find true life through faith in the resurrected Christ.
- Believers can live with the assurance of the resurrection and eternal reign of Christ.

As a group, discuss how the church can bear witness to the resurrection of Jesus throughout the year, beyond Easter. How can your group lead the way?

Reflect on the time when you first placed your trust in Jesus. (If you have not done so, review the information on the inside front cover to find out more about how you can do this.) With whom can you share about your salvation this week?

List some benefits of the resurrection in the believer's life. Which of those benefits do you most need in your life right now? Thank God for providing that benefit through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: The details of Jesus' resurrection are important.

Read John 20:3-7, looking for the specific details John shared.

After the Sabbath was over, Mary and a few other women had gone to anoint Jesus' body with spices, only to discover that the stone had been removed from the tomb. At first, the women thought someone helpfully moved the stone so that they could anoint Jesus' body (Mark 16:3-4). But realizing the tomb was empty, Mary was distraught over the thought that someone had stolen Jesus' body, and she had to inform the disciples immediately.

Mary's news apparently jarred John and Peter so much that they went immediately to check things out for themselves. John and Peter found something unique and unusual with the burial cloths in the tomb. The face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head was folded up in a place by itself. Perhaps John's point by making much of the burial cloths was to show that if grave robbers or enemies of Jesus had taken His body, they would have taken everything or discarded the cloths into a heap on the floor. They wouldn't have taken time to fold them.

How do the details included by John give credence to his account of Jesus' resurrection? Which detail carries the greatest weight or significance for you?

Day 2: Jesus' resurrection fulfilled what had been written about Him.

Read John 20:8-9, underling the phrase "saw and believed."

John saw and believed. But what did John believe? Some might argue that John simply believed Mary's report that someone took Jesus' body. After all, the tomb was empty. But since the cloths were there, John likely concluded something different. Perhaps in that moment the words of Jesus shot through his heart like a lightning bolt: "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). What John saw—and what he didn't see—caused him to believe that Jesus had risen.

What is interesting is John's clarification in verse 9. Even though John believed, he said they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Certainly, Peter, John and the other disciples heard Jesus foretell His crucifixion and resurrection, as the Gospels make clear. But as for understanding the Scripture, this would come later as Jesus opened their eyes to understand what had been written about Him and fulfilled in Him (Luke 24:25-27,44-48).

What is the connection between seeing and believing? Can you believe in Jesus without fully understanding? What are the ramifications of your answer?

Day 3: Jesus died so that believers would live.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:20-22, noting how we are made alive.

One major implication of Jesus' resurrection is that those who belong to Jesus will also one day be resurrected to life. Jesus' resurrection guarantees ours. Paul referred to Jesus' resurrection as the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. Paul's use of the term firstfruits is instructive, recalling the firstborn child, animal, or first harvest of a crop that would be considered holy and belonging to the Lord. The firstfruits, as a foretaste of more to come, were offered to God in thanksgiving for His graciousness in providing them. Jesus' resurrection was the pattern of things to come, a foretaste for those who belong to Christ.

All who are in Adam (by nature) die physically and spiritually, because death came through him. The sad consequences of Adam and Eve's sin against God affected not only them but us as well. Through Adam's sin came judgment and condemnation (see Rom. 5:16). The good news is that all who are in Christ (by faith) shall ... be made alive in Him—referring to a future resurrection.

Notice that both verses 21 and 22 begin with *for*, showing a vital connection with what precedes them. Paul's flow of thought is that those who "have fallen asleep" (died) experience the consequential reality of what happened through Adam as a result of his sin. But thanks to Jesus Christ, death is not the end of the story for those who have faith. We will be made alive in Christ, who is Himself "the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). So now, having been justified in Christ by faith, we wait for the redemption of our bodies (Rom 8:23-25).

How do the results of the resurrection identified by Paul give you hope? Hope for what?

Day 4: Believers will experience future resurrection at the coming of Christ.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:23, considering the benefits of belonging to Christ.

There is an orderliness to the benefits of the resurrection: each in his own order. Jesus' resurrection qualifies Him as the firstfruits. Again, He is the pattern and the reason for our future resurrection. Then at His coming those who belong to Christ will be made alive and experience a resurrection of their own in Him. What inexpressible joy is to be gained in our future resurrection!

Jesus said He would come again for His followers after preparing a place for us (John 14:1-6). Every generation of Christians has prayed and longed for the return of Christ in their time. At His coming, those who belong to Christ will receive the same powerful, glorious resurrection that Jesus did (Rom. 6:5; 1 Thess. 4:14).

**How does the promised return of Christ give you strength when facing challenges?
How can you demonstrate the hope you have in Christ?**

Day 5: God will reign over all people.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:24-28, noting to whom you will be subject.

Several profound activities occur as the result of Christ's victorious resurrection and triumphant return. First, Jesus will hand over the kingdom to God the Father. The kingdom is the rule and reign of God over all things and all people. Second, Jesus will put all his enemies under his feet. As it stands, the last enemy to be destroyed is death. The truth is, death has been defeated but has not yet been abolished and subjected to Christ (Heb. 2:8).

Finally, Christ Himself will be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him. When Paul said that Christ will be subject to the Father, he was not in any way implying that the Son is inferior to the Father. The Persons of the Trinity are equal in essence and glory. The subordination Paul spoke about was one of role or function.

How does the promise of God's complete reign impact how you live today?

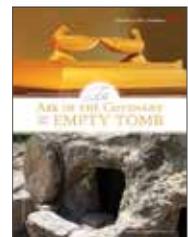
TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in John 20 and 1 Corinthians 15, sharing with two other members of your Bible study group.

What evidence to you is most compelling when considering the reality of Jesus' resurrection?

Share your salvation story. How does faith in the resurrected Christ give you a reason to hope?

Paul helps us to understand and embrace the certainty of eternal life, which the resurrection of Christ provides. Our lives should reflect that assurance. What assurances does the resurrection provide for you?



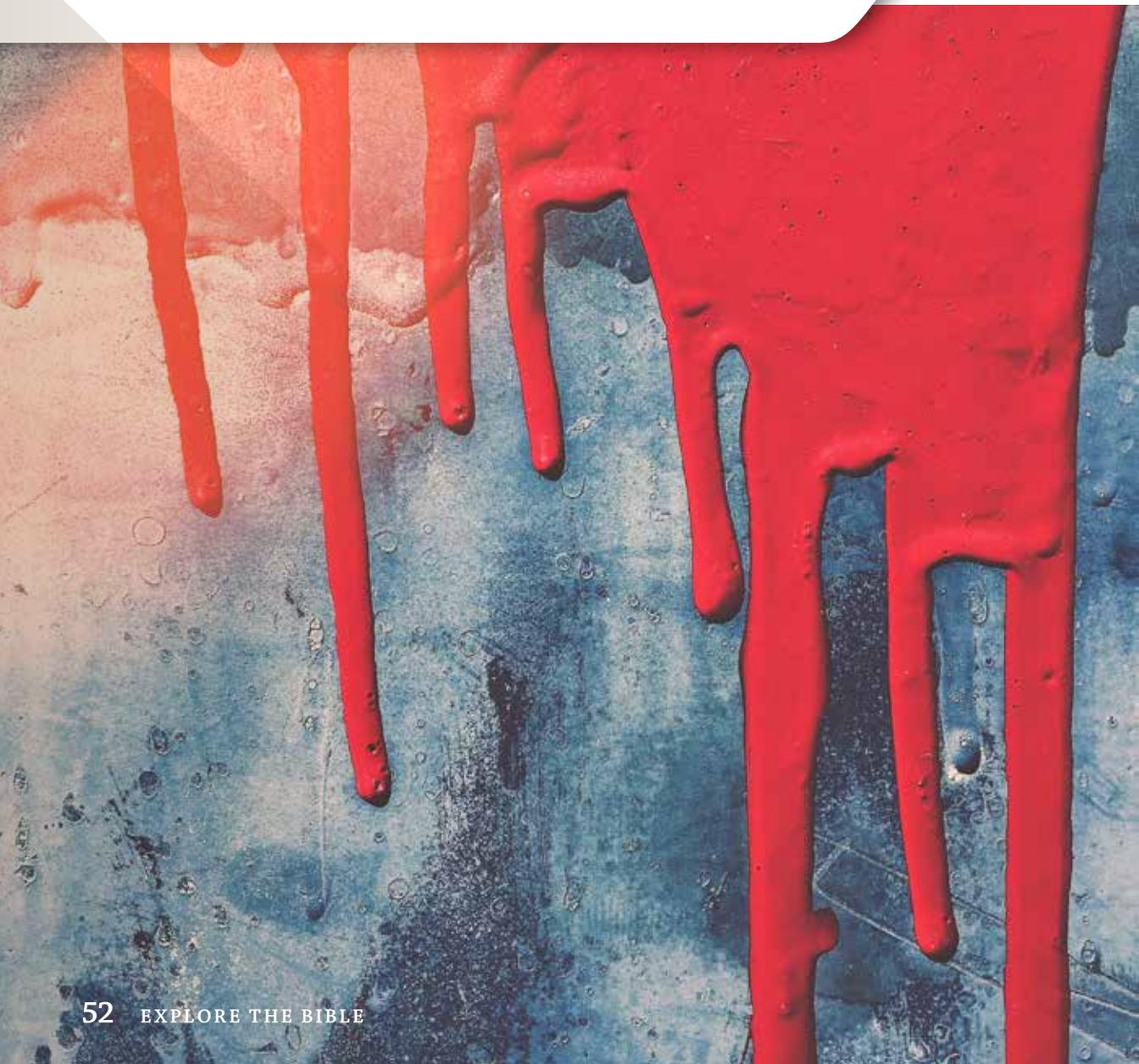
For additional context, read "The Ark of the Covenant and the Empty Tomb" in the Spring 2018 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

Session 6

Remembering the Sacrifice

*Believers are to approach remembrances of Jesus' death
with reverence and unity.*

1 Corinthians 11:17-29



What memorial places are special to you? What makes that place special or significant?

Memorials are often created following major events, such as the USS Arizona Memorial in Pearl Harbor. These are solemn places that cause us to reflect on life and our purposes on this earth. There are also happier kinds of memorials, such as the birthplace of a president or a shrine of a local sports hero. Perhaps you have a personal memory that you've memorialized so that you and others won't forget.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Scripture notes numerous examples of memorial places or events. The Israelites gathered twelve stones from the Jordan River to set up a permanent marker of their miraculous crossing into the promised land. The annual Passover meal was a way to remember the Lord's deliverance of His people from Egypt. Jesus used the occasion of eating the Passover with His disciples to establish a new memorial, the Lord's Supper. In this week's study, we'll look at what Paul taught the believers in Corinth concerning the right way—and the wrong way—to remember Jesus' death through the Lord's Supper.

Paul continued giving practical instruction concerning church matters in chapters 11–14, especially in relation to corporate worship. Some unhelpful things were taking place during worship in the Corinthian church that were destructive and harmful. In chapter 11, Paul offered instruction for head coverings and the Lord's Supper.

Chapters 12 and 14 focus on unity and diversity in the church, specifically in the use of spiritual gifts. As in other areas, the Corinthian believers were not handling this aspect of church life appropriately, causing Paul to pen one of the most beautiful chapters in all of the New Testament, which highlighted the superiority of love (chap. 13).

This week's study focuses on the observance of the Lord's Supper. Unfortunately, the Corinthian believers were missing the mark in their practice of observing the Lord's Supper. Paul chided and instructed them in order to help them avoid judgment for sinning against one another and against Christ. As they approached the Lord's table, they were to do so with worship, with remembrance, and with examination.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:17-29

17 Now in giving this instruction I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. **18** For to begin with, I hear that when you come together as a church there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. **19** Indeed, it is necessary that there be factions among you, so that those who are approved may be recognized among you. **20** When you come together, then, it is **not to eat the LORD's Supper** **A**. **21** For at the meal, each one eats his own supper. So one person is hungry while another gets **drunk** **B**! **22** Don't you have homes in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I praise you? I do not praise you in this matter! **23** For I received from the LORD what I also passed on to you: On the night when he was betrayed, the LORD Jesus took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." **25** In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." **26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the LORD's death until he comes. **27** So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the LORD in **an unworthy manner** **C** will be guilty of sin against the body and blood of the LORD. **28** Let a person **examine** **D** himself; in this way let him eat the bread and drink from the cup. **29** For whoever eats and drinks without recognizing the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself.

Passage Outline

With Worship
(1 Cor. 11:17-22)

With Remembrance
(1 Cor. 11:23-26)

With Examination
(1 Cor. 11:27-29)

Keywords

- a. The meal belongs to the Lord. The ordinance's purpose was to remember Jesus' sacrificial death for humankind's sin and to declare His expected return. Paul chastised them for coming together not in accord but in quarreling.
- b. People were drinking in excess, becoming intoxicated. Paul emphasized that some members of the church were not charitable with other believers.
- c. They had failed to remember the Lord's body and sacrifice. It's possible that people observed the Lord's Supper with unconfessed sin.
- d. Examination should be done before observing the Lord's Supper. The issues at hand are salvation and sanctification.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Paul said when they Corinthians came together it was not for the better but for the worse. There were divisions among them. The intention of the church, of course, was to observe the Lord's Supper as they met together—and Paul had every expectation they would follow his instructions. But instead, at the meal, each one ate his own meal without regard to other believers.

What factors contribute to a religious observance becoming misguided? What can be done to keep the focus of a religious practice on God and His purposes?

Paul reminded them of the historical and theological content of the Lord's Supper and why it matters. He recalled the night when Jesus was betrayed as the historical moment when Jesus gave this instruction to His disciples.

How did Paul's use of the plural "you" in these verses confront the selfish individualism of the Corinthians that Paul was addressing?

When the church comes together corporately to observe the Lord's Supper, we are to commemorate and celebrate the broken body and spilled blood of Jesus for us. When we eat this bread and drink the cup, we proclaim the Lord's death. It is a corporate affirmation and declaration of Jesus' all-sufficient sacrifice for our sins. The bread and the cup become a visual representation—a tangible expression—of the gospel.

How can the Lord's Supper be a means of sharing the gospel with others?

BIBLE SKILL: Read, reflect on, and react emotionally to a Bible text. – Read 1 Corinthians 11:26-27 aloud several times. Each time, emphasize different words. For example, in one reading emphasize "bread" and "cup" each time they appear. Then read the text again, emphasizing all the action words. Take note of your thoughts. How do these verses move you emotionally? What feelings were evoked by the different words and phrases as you emphasized them?

Paul's disappointment in the Corinthians' actions toward one another issued into a call for self-examination. What did Paul mean by unworthy manner? The immediate context provides understanding. Given the divisions and factions, it's likely that taking the Lord's Supper without recognizing the body of believers is what he had in mind.

How might a person approach the Lord's Supper in "an unworthy manner"? What might one do to properly prepare to observe the Lord's Supper?

So let a person examine himself, Paul said, to make sure one is not profaning the sacrifice by privileging himself above the whole body. If the Lord considers this issue serious enough to levy this kind of judgment against errant believers, we ought to consider its importance also and examine ourselves.

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers are to approach the observance of the Lord's Supper with worshipful reverence.
- Believers can proclaim their faith in Christ through the proper observance of the Lord's Supper.
- Believers are to be invited to humbly participate in the observance of the Lord's Supper.

What actions do you need to personally take to safeguard against abusing or ignoring the observance of Lord's Supper? How can you encourage others to focus on the significance of the Lord's Supper?

As a group, list different ways that the Lord's Supper can be taken in a worship setting. Discuss as a group ways group members can encourage one another to participate in the Lord's Supper in a proper way.

Take a few minutes to pray and ask the Lord to reveal any way in which you may have been minimizing the significance of the Lord's Supper. Confess it to Him, and commit yourself to obey His correction the next time you observe the Lord's Supper.

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Our focus should always be on God.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:20-22, identifying what behavior is not acceptable.

Unlike the observance of many churches today, where the Lord's Supper is part of a corporate worship service, the Corinthian believers included the Lord's Supper as part of a meal they would eat together. This pattern comes from the Gospels, where Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper as they were eating (see Matt. 26:26; Mark 14:22). But the meal devolved into a self-focused free-for-all.

Sadly, some brothers and sisters were gorging themselves on food and drink, while others didn't have much to enjoy. Paul was astounded that one goes hungry, another gets drunk. Believers are to be conscientious about others in the church so that they do not discriminate against the poor (even unintentionally). Selfishly, some Corinthian believers were eating to please themselves but missing the greater purposes of the meal. In fact, their actions actually served to humiliate those who had nothing. Paul was exasperated by this nonsense. The Corinthians had forgotten that the Lord's Supper is for corporate worship, not merely to fill one's belly.

What can you do to keep the focus of a religious practice on God and His purposes?

Day 2: The Lord's Supper is a time of remembrance.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-24, considering the circumstances under which the first Lord's Supper was held.

There is no small theological debate over what "This is my body" means. Some, like Roman Catholics, have taken this to mean that the bread and the cup actually become the body and blood of Jesus (called transubstantiation). Others believe that the literal body and blood of Jesus are "in, with, and under" the elements, but do not become them (called consubstantiation). Most others argue that Jesus is present symbolically in the elements—which seems to be indicated by Jesus' emphasis on remembrance. Of course, mere symbolism doesn't account for the deep, spiritual realities of our participation in the body and blood of Jesus (1 Cor. 10:16). The Lord's Supper is a rich commemoration of the sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf. We are to give thanks for the bread, and in obedience do so in remembrance of Jesus and His sacrifice for us.

How does a broken piece of bread symbolize what Jesus endured for you?

Day 3: Every Lord's Supper observance should be approached with equal reverence.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:25-26, paying close attention to verse 26.

Paul noted that Jesus took the cup, which the Lord identified as the new covenant in my blood. The old covenant, based on law, served the purpose for which God designed it—as a shadow pointing to the true substance in Christ—but it was empty. God promised a new covenant for His people (Jer. 31:31-34), and it came in Jesus' blood.

Like the bread, when we take the cup we are to do it in remembrance of Jesus' death for us. Jesus gave no prescription for the frequency with which we are to observe the Lord's Supper, just as often as you drink it.

How does observing the Lord's Supper give you confidence in your salvation?

Day 4: We should approach the Lord's Supper with an attitude of unity, love, and service.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:27, underling the phrase “an unworthy manner.”

Individualism, divisions, and factions—these are harmful to the gospel because unity, love, and service to one another should be the hallmarks of Jesus' new covenant community. Overlooking others and considering only one's own benefit reflects an unworthy manner of approaching the Lord's Supper. Those who act this way are guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. To profane the Lord's Supper is to misunderstand and devalue its meaning by overlooking those who participate in it. Why? Because His body was for the body—the church! Paul already said that to sin against one's brother or sister is to sin against Christ who died for them (1 Cor. 8:12). Divisiveness and apathy within the church are incompatible with the sacrificial nature of Jesus' death.

How might you approach the Lord's Supper in “an unworthy manner”? How can you safeguard yourself from doing so?

Day 5: Every believer should examine themselves before partaking.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:28-29, looking for who is held accountable for their actions.

Too often verse 28 is understood simply to be self-introspection, but the context is dealing with communal and fellowship issues in the congregation. Is there a broader application for self-examination for sin before taking the Lord's Supper? Certainly, we must not approach the table in a way that leaves sin unchecked, thereby ignoring the purpose of Christ's atonement to deal with sin.

Paul finished his thought by stating the reason for self-examination: so that no one eats and drinks judgment on himself. The Lord executed His judgment on those who despised the church (1 Cor. 11:22) by their selfish actions. As startling as it may sound, Paul said, "That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died" (v. 30).

How should you prepare before participating in the Lord's Supper?

TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in 1 Corinthians 11, sharing with two other members of your Bible study group.

What truths has God brought to light for you this week? How can you make the Lord's Supper a meaningful experience between yourself and God?

As you discuss the Lord's Supper with unbelievers, what would you share about the importance of not only the practice, but also a person's attitude toward the practice?



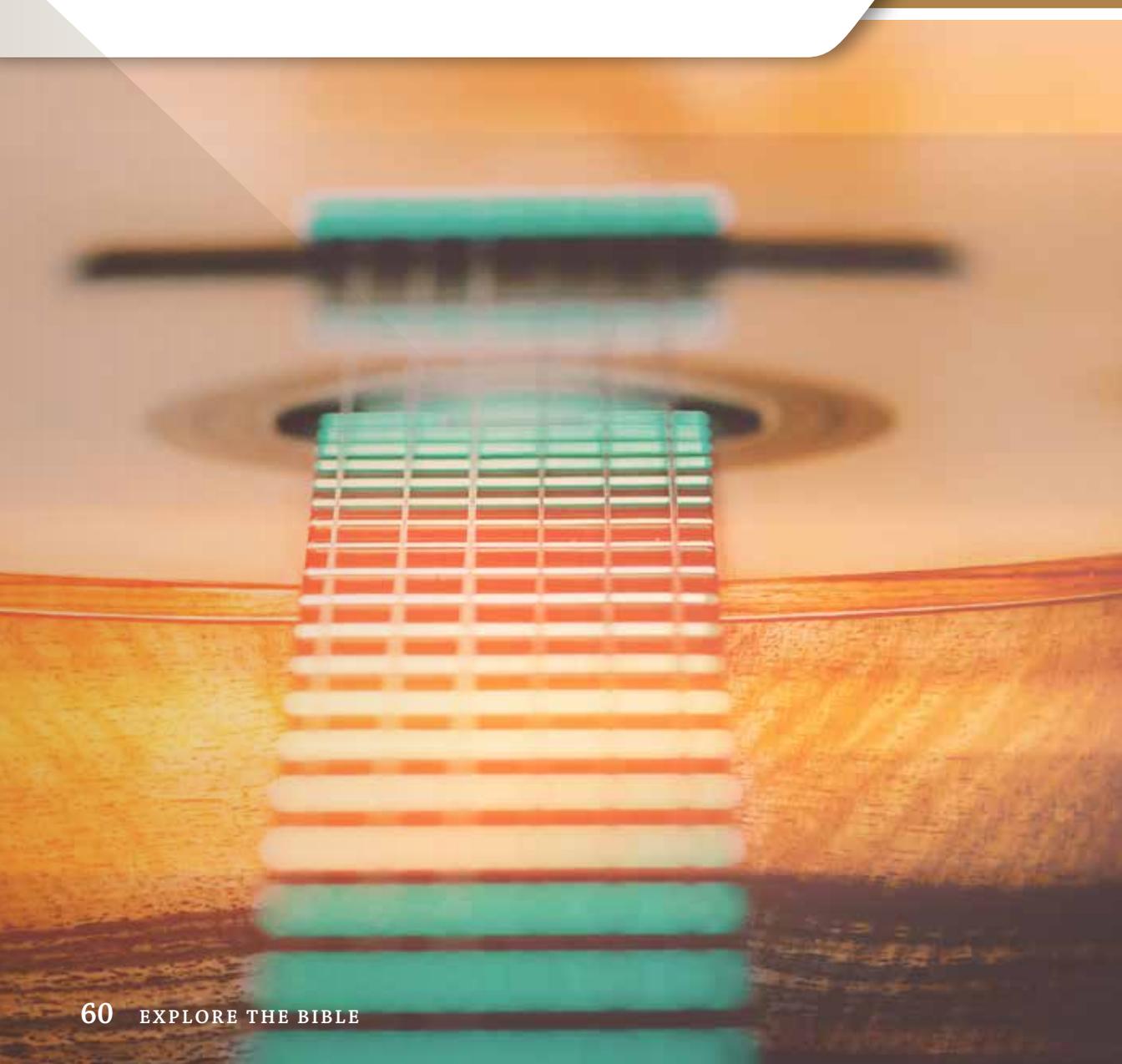
For additional context, read "The Lord's Supper and the Love Feast" in the Spring 2018 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

Session 7

Serving God's People

Believers receive special gifts from God for service to Him and His people.

1 Corinthians 12:4-12,21-26



What factors would you point to when thinking about people who are high achievers in their field? What factor do you think plays the biggest role? Explain.

Think about someone who is athletically gifted. Now consider a gifted musician. How did those individuals get that way? If we focus on the hours of practice they endure, we might be led to think practice is what sets them apart. If we focus on the natural abilities required, we might be led to excuse ourselves from even trying to reach those same achievements.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

God gives spiritual gifts to His people. These gifts are parallel to natural talents in many ways. Spiritual gifts, however, are received by individuals not when they are born biologically; rather, they are given to us when we are born again. Further, just as natural talents must be recognized and developed through practice before they are very beneficial, so it is with our spiritual gifts. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul told the Corinthian Christians that each of them had received a special gift, or gifts, from God. These gifts were meant for service.

“Now concerning spiritual gifts,” Paul wrote in verse 1, signaling a new subject he wanted to address. The Corinthian believers were seeking guidance on a variety of issues, including marital relations and singleness (7:1,25), food sacrificed to idols (8:1), divisiveness around the Lord’s Supper (11:17-20), spiritual gifts (12:1), the resurrection (15:1), and collecting money to support other believers in need (16:1).

Paul’s discussion of spiritual gifts stretches from 12:1 through 14:40. He wanted them to know that they did not lack any spiritual gift. He also wanted them to understand the proper application of spiritual gifts in the church—the “better way” (12:31)—which is love.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-12, 21-26

4 Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit.

5 There are different ministries, but the same LORD. **6** And there are different activities, but the same God produces each gift in each person.

7 A **manifestation of the Spirit** **A** is given to each person for the common good: **8** to one is given a message of **wisdom** **B** through the Spirit, to another, a message of knowledge by the same Spirit, **9** to another, **faith** **C** by the same Spirit, to another, gifts of healing by the one Spirit, **10** to another, the performing of **miracles** **D**, to another, prophecy, to another, **distinguishing** **E** between spirits, to another, different kinds of tongues, to another, interpretation of tongues. **11** One and the same Spirit is active in all these, distributing to each person as he wills. **12** For just as the body is one and has many parts, and all the parts of that body, though many, are one body — so also is Christ. ...

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” Or again, the head can’t say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” **22** On the contrary, those parts of the body that are weaker are indispensable.

23 And those parts of the body that we consider less honorable, we clothe these with greater honor, and our unrespectable parts are treated with greater respect, **24** which our respectable parts do not need. Instead, God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the less honorable, **25** so that there would be **no division in the body** **F**, but that the members would have the same concern for each other. **26** So if one member suffers, **all the members suffer** **G** with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

Passage Outline

Diverse (1 Cor. 12:4-6)

Specific (1 Cor. 12:7-10)

Intentional

(1 Cor. 12:11-12,21-26)

Keywords

- a. The activity of God is in each believer’s life.
- b. The ability to know and reveal the mind of God (Jas. 1:5).
- c. This gift isn’t saving faith; it’s trusting in the Lord and living “by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7).
- d. These are supernatural events beyond human possibility. God gets the glory (Eph. 3:20-21).
- e. The divine ability to discern truth from error.
- f. Divisions may include spiritual, doctrinal, and relational strife; tension; and brokenness. God longs for unity, not division (Ps. 133:1).
- g. When one person in the church body hurts or rejoices, the remainder do as well. This is a beautiful picture of fellowship.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

The Corinthians' spiritual unity was grounded in their common confession that "Jesus is Lord" (12:3). Yet their diversity was expressed through varieties of gifts ... varieties of service ... varieties of activities. The Spirit gives diverse gifts, and those gifts manifest themselves through various ministries in the church and through a broad range of activities that equip and edify God's people.

Why is it important for each believer to realize that God has uniquely gifted him or her? What are the dangers of wanting to be gifted in a different way?

The purpose of spiritual gifts is not to build up individuals, but to benefit the church. Each gift is important and intentional for the functioning of the body. No one can boast about gifts because they are produced by the Spirit. We might desire certain gifts over others, but the Spirit distributes His gifts to each person as he wills.

Other than a body, how would you illustrate what Paul was teaching in this passage? What would you emphasize and why?

Paul painted a picture of the importance of each believer and his or her role by comparing it to a foot or an ear revolting because it was not a hand or an eye (12:13-20).

Paul's main concern in these verses was for the Corinthian believers to understand that they needed one another, including the weaker and less honorable members of the body. Paul laid out his case with four key claims.

First, the members of the body need each other. Second, the weaker are indispensable. Third, the less honorable members are to be given greater honor and treated with greater respect. Fourth, if something affects one member, all the members are affected as well. Likewise, if one member is honored, all rejoice together. The bottom line is, each member is important and each is to care for the other, since all make up "the body of Christ and [are] individually members of it" (12:27).

How does the variety of gifts in a church give greater value to the giftedness of an individual? Why might a person devalue the role or gift God has given him? How can a person protect himself from devaluing his giftedness?

BIBLE SKILL: Identify the imagery in a passage and discover what it communicates. – Observe the words and phrases in 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 that describe a human body and its various parts. What does each word communicate to you about the nature of the church as the body of Christ and the role of individual believers? How is the imagery of the body like (or unlike) a local Christian congregation?

APPLY THE TEXT

- All believers are gifted to fulfill a God-initiated role in the ministry of the church.
- Believers receive specific gifts given at the Holy Spirit's discretion.
- Believers add value to the church when they use their God-given spiritual gifts in kingdom work.

As a group, discuss how a believer comes to know or understand that he or she has a particular spiritual gift. How can the Bible study group help members discover and exercise those gifts?

Seek to identify the spiritual gift(s) God has given you. (You can find a spiritual gifts inventory in the downloads under the resources tab at blog.LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.) How are you using your gift to build up your local church? What actions do you need to take to be more effective?

Take time to reflect on how God has used you to make a difference in His church. Thank Him for the opportunities and ask Him to help you be more sensitive to being used by Him in the future.

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Spiritual gifts are given by God.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, considering the differences and similarities discussed.

Paul didn't attempt to offer a robust treatment of God's triune being in these verses, but he did reveal it and affirm it as essential for the Corinthians' understanding of their own spiritual identity. Just as the Father, Son, and Spirit are one in essence, so also believers are one in Christ. Just as the Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct, complementary persons with unique roles in the Godhead, so also believers are diverse, complementary parts with a variety of roles in the one body of Christ.

Paul later said that the Holy Spirit "apportions to each one individually as he will" (12:11). For this reason, we refer to these gifts as spiritual gifts. Paul was not talking about natural abilities shared by both believer and non-believer. Rather, he was referring to supernatural endowments upon believers by the Spirit.

Paul was clear that these diverse spiritual gifts are produced in and distributed to believers as God sees fit. The spiritual reality behind diverse spiritual gifts in the church is this: "God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose" (12:18).

Why is it important for you to realize that God has uniquely gifted you? What are the dangers of wanting to be gifted in a different way?

Day 2: Every believer has a unique spiritual gift.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:7, underlining the phrase "for the common good."

The specific gifts Paul identified in these verses represent a manifestation of the Spirit that is given ... for the common good. For this reason, Paul warned the Corinthians about thinking they were more important than others in the church because of their particular gift or ministry in the church (12:15-24). Two chapters later Paul exhorted them "to excel in building up the church" (14:12) rather than building up themselves. Although the Spirit gives individual gifts to each person in the church, the purpose is the growth and edification of the whole.

Identify ways in which a person might use a spiritual gift to benefit himself or herself rather than the church. How can you guard against those tendencies?

Day 3: Believers should use the spiritual gifts given to them for the purpose God has provided.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, identifying different gifts that are given to believers.

Paul mentioned first the utterance of wisdom and the utterance of knowledge—the assumption is that these must reflect a different subject matter, such as wisdom representing a practical message and knowledge representing a doctrinal message. Next, Paul mentioned the gift of faith. He didn't mean saving faith, which would apply to all believers. The gift of faith is likely a special, Spirit-wrought trust in God to bring about something specific.

Paul added the gifts of healing and the working of miracles. Note the use of the plurals here, suggesting there were various and different gifts of healing. Presumably, the working of miracles includes healing, which itself is a miracle, but miracles here contain more than healing. Prophecy is next in the list. This is not predicting the future but rather the proclamation of something that God has brought to mind for the edification of the church.

Lastly, Paul mentioned various kinds of tongues and the interpretation of tongues. Paul mentioned tongues here but didn't discuss it. He would do so in chapter 14, where he argued that prophesy supersedes tongues in the life of the church, but that tongues were not to be forbidden if there is an orderliness to them and if an interpreter is present. If there is no one to offer interpretation, the one desiring to speak in tongues is to “keep silent in church” (1 Cor. 14:28), and at the most, two or three would be allowed to speak in tongues (v. 27)—as opposed to the congregation speaking all at once.

How does knowing that it is the Holy Spirit who gives the gifts create confidence in a you to exercise your gift? How is receiving a spiritual gift part of a your stewardship?

Day 4: The body of Christ is made up of many members, all with different spiritual gifts.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:11-12, noting the reference to the body.

Paul used the analogy of the human body to describe the unity and diversity of the body of Christ. A single body has many members to it. Yet all the parts of that body, though many, comprise only one body. The church is not filled with cookie-cutter believers. The beauty of the church, like the beauty of the human body, is found in its diversity.

Other than a body, how would you illustrate what Paul was teaching in this passage? What would you emphasize and why?

Day 5: All believers are needed in the body of Christ.

Read 1 Corinthians 12: 21-26, looking for why all parts of the body of Christ are important.

Paul laid out his case for the Corinthian believers to understand that they needed one another with four key claims.

First, higher profile members need the lesser, just as the lesser profile members need the higher. Second, the weaker are indispensable. This is God's economy and God's design, especially regarding those who make up His church.

Third, we are not to treat people as the world does, showing favoritism (see Jas. 2:1-9). Rather, we bestow respect and honor especially upon the parts that lack those things. Fourth, Paul wanted the members of the church to have concern for each other. If they do, then if one member suffers, all suffer together. Likewise, if one member is honored, all rejoice together. .

Why might you devalue the role or gift God has given you? How can you protect yourself from devaluing your giftedness?

TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in 1 Corinthians 12, sharing with two other members of your Bible study group.

Take some time to consider the spiritual gifts God has given you individually and as a whole. Are you using those gifts to further the kingdom of God? What steps can you take this week to use your spiritual gift?

Do you ever feel like you have nothing to contribute to the church body? Give each other ideas for how you might be able to use your spiritual gifts.



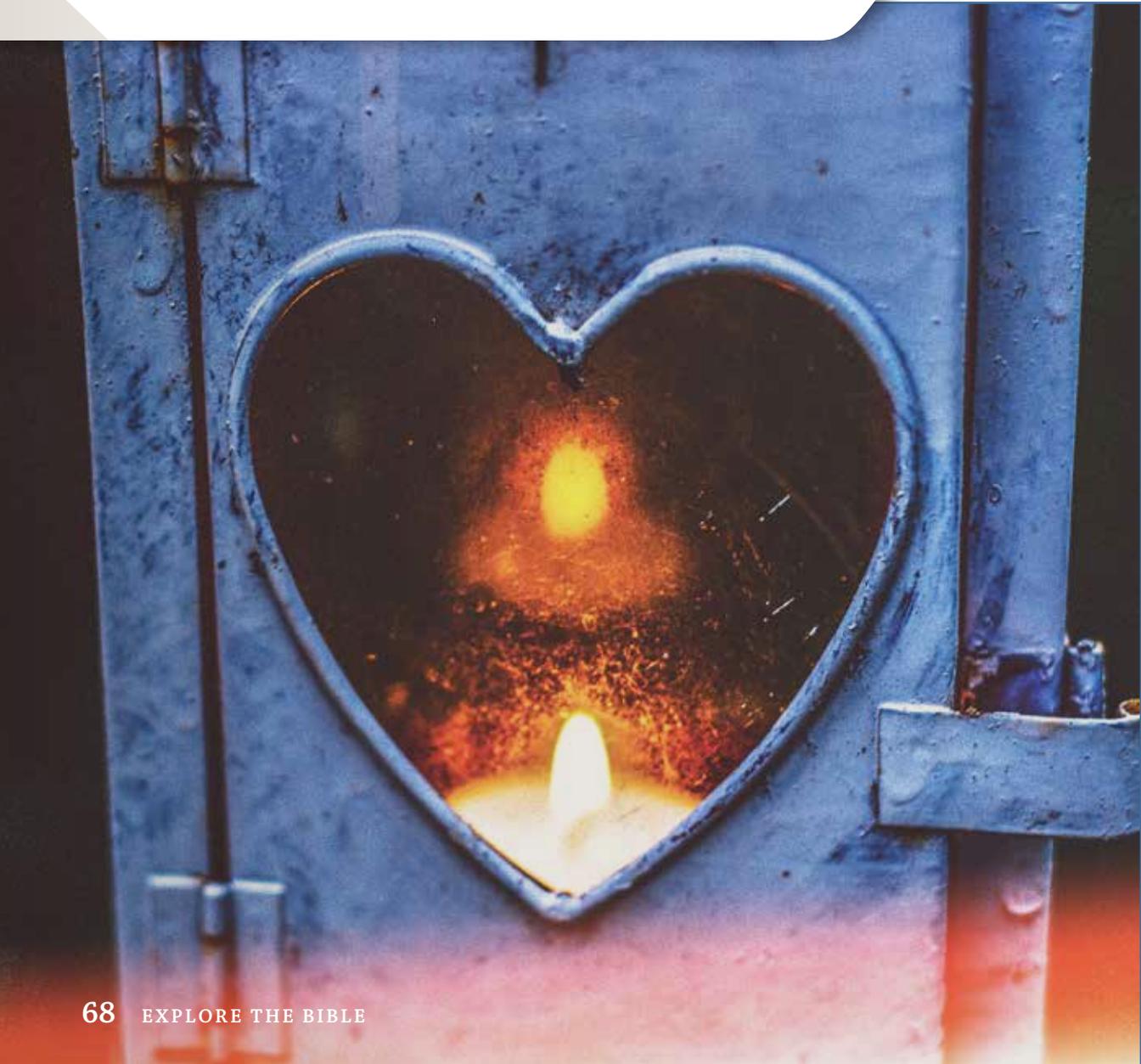
For additional context, read "Paul's Spiritual Gifts Lists, A Comparison," an archived *Biblical Illustrator* article provided on the CD-ROM in the Spring 2018 *Explore the Bible: Leader Pack*.

Session 8

Understanding Love

Believers are to be motivated by love when serving others.

1 Corinthians 13:1-13



**What song, movie, or book comes to mind when you think about the topic of love?
What line or scene stands out? How is love portrayed in that song or story?**

Love is one of the most common themes found in music, literature, and film. Arguably, there is an angle of love in nearly every story, whether it is the desire for love, the loss of love, or complicated love. Love is a common human experience. We love family and friends, and we search for that true love with whom we can share our lives.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

First Corinthians 13 is one of the most famous chapters in the Bible, and rightly so. Love is central to the message of the gospel itself (John 3:16). Indeed, the Bible's simplest description of God's character is love (see 1 John 4:8). Love is foundational to Christian identity, Christian theology, and Christian living.

Unfortunately, this chapter is often read and understood in isolation from its context. No doubt, there is a unique quality to Paul's content that stands on its own (for example, reading it in a wedding ceremony). But Paul's overarching discussion in chapters 12–14 is about spiritual gifts, ministries, and activities in the life and worship of the church. Some gifts, coupled with divisions and self-centered behavior, caused problems in the Corinthian church.

Paul intentionally inserted this digression about love to clarify and establish “an even better way” (1 Cor. 12:31) for the Corinthians to act. He wanted them to “desire spiritual gifts,” especially prophecy (1 Cor. 14:1); but spiritual gifts are not ultimate, love is. If the church is not being built up, then spiritual gifts are not being used appropriately. Simply put, “everything is to be done for building up” (1 Cor. 14:26). How can this happen without love?

Paul concluded his letter by striking on the note of love once again. Although his letter is saturated with commands, rebukes, and exhortations, Paul wanted the Corinthians to know of his deep affection for them as the final word: “My love be with all of you in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor. 16:24).

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-13

1 If I speak human or angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a **noisy gong or a clanging cymbal** **ⓐ**.

2 If I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so that I can move mountains but do not have love, **I am nothing** **ⓑ**. **3** And if I give away all my possessions, and if I give over my body in order to boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient, love is **kind** **ⓒ**. Love does not envy, is not boastful, is not arrogant, **5 is not rude** **ⓓ**, is **not self-seeking** **ⓔ**, is not irritable, and does not keep a record of wrongs. **6** Love finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth.

7 It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. **8** Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. **9** For we **know in part** **ⓕ**, and we prophesy in part, **10 but when the perfect comes** **ⓖ**, the partial will come to an end. **11** When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, **I put aside childish things** **ⓗ**. **12** For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, as I am fully known. **13** Now these three remain: faith, hope, and love — but the greatest of these is love.

Passage Outline

Necessity of Love
(1 Cor. 13:1-3)

Nature of Love
(1 Cor. 13:4-7)

Permanence of Love
(1 Cor. 13:8-13)

Keywords

- a. The absence of love creates a disobedient life.
- b. Christians may use their talents, but it is of no eternal value if love is not present.
- c. Be considerate, generous, useful, and benevolent toward others.
- d. *Agape* love shows respect for people.
- e. God's plan is for us to die to self (Phil. 2:3-4).
- f. Knowledge is limited, so disciple-making is a lifelong process.
- g. Refers to Jesus' second coming. The redeemed will see Jesus face to face in His second coming.
- h. Maturity in Christ changes our beliefs and behaviors. Sanctification is the process of becoming Christlike (Rom. 8:28-29).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

The “more excellent way” (1 Cor. 12:31) that Paul wanted to show the Corinthians was the way of love. The predominant word for love in the New Testament is *agape*, which Paul used here. *Agape* is a self-sacrificial, willful action that has another person’s best outcome in view. Paul’s opening point is clear and simple. Without love the gift and the gift-bearer become nothing more than empty, meaningless noise. Love is necessary and indispensable for the body to function as God designed it.

What would it look like for spiritual gifts to function without love?

Spiritual gifts and spiritual activities attest nothing spiritual about you if love is absent. After all, love is the first and primary aspect of the multi-faceted fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). Even the ultimate physical sacrifice of martyrdom falls short of praise in Paul’s estimation if that person lacks love.

What modern day priorities or activities do we elevate that Paul might have declared to be “nothing” without love?

Love is not so much defined in these verses as it is described. The emphasis is behavioral rather than ideological. There is a protecting, trusting, optimistic, persevering character to love rather than the selfish, critical, envious, and unrighteous character that was being displayed in the Corinthian church. Paul issued this summary description as a call to amend their ways and reflect the kind of love that Christ called his disciples to show (John 13:34-35).

How is the description of love given by Paul seen in God’s character? How does substituting the word “love” with “God” give you a better understanding of the relationship between the love defined by Paul and the character to God?

BIBLE SKILL: Create a compare/contrast chart to study a passage. – Review 1 Corinthians 13 and create a chart. In one column, list words and phrases that are not characteristic of love. In a second column, list words and phrases that are characteristic of love. What insights do you gain by comparing the two lists? Are any opposites included? What action gives you the greatest trouble? Which action do you find the most significant?

So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three. Faith remains because we will always trust and rely on the Lord. Hope remains because we will always hold to the promises God has made. Love is superior to everything else, even faith and hope, because love is an all-encompassing virtue. In fact, Paul’s argument all along has been that love is foundational to everything in life and in the church.

What is the relationship between faith, hope, and love? Can a person have faith, hope, and love apart from a relationship with Jesus? Explain.

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers who use their gifts in love will make the greatest impact.
- Believers should be characterized by actions that demonstrate godly love for others.
- Believers should base their lives on things that have an eternal duration, with love being one such thing.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 and replace the word “love” with your name. What actions do you need to take to make what you just read true?

As a group, identify actions the group needs to take to better demonstrate the kind of love described in this passage. List one thing you can do to help your group better demonstrate this kind of love.

Examine your motives for serving in the church. Do your motives align with the teachings of Paul in 1 Corinthians 13? What adjustments do you need to make to your motives for serving?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Love is required to share the gospel.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-2, highlighting the last half of verse 2.

Apparently, the Corinthian church put an overemphasis on the gift and practice of speaking in tongues, given the amount of attention and clarification Paul devoted to the issue in chapters 12–14. Speaking in the tongues of men and of angels is an empty pursuit if I have not love.

Even the “higher gifts” (1 Cor. 12:31), like prophetic powers and knowledge, are worthless without love. The entire next chapter lifts up the gift of prophecy and the important role it has for building up the church. Yet anyone who has the gift of prophecy but doesn’t have love is nothing. No matter how much good comes from prophecy, it is intrinsically valueless unless it operates with love.

Paul said the same thing about understanding all mysteries and all knowledge. Perhaps since Paul was framing this in the first person, the point might be more exact to say that the person who acquires such knowledge is nothing without love. Either way, the necessity of love is central.

What would it look like for your spiritual gifts to function without love?

Day 2: Love should be your motivating principle for sacrifice.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:3, identifying what can be gained with love.

Jesus taught in the Gospels that “if you have faith and do not doubt” and demand that a mountain be cast into the sea, “it will happen” (Matt. 21:21). What an amazing statement! Surely Paul had this kind of faith in mind when he referred to the spiritual gift of faith earlier (1 Cor. 12:9). Yet such an incredible spiritual gift of faith that can remove mountains amounts to nothing without love. Faith is not unimportant, but it pales in comparison with the selfless, others-focused love that Paul prized above all else.

Love is also more important than any personal sacrifice we might offer, even for the benefit for others. Even if I give away all I have, Paul said, I gain nothing of lasting significance if love is left out. Sharing one’s possessions with those in need is a clear signal of gospel life operating in us (see Mark 10:17-31; Acts 2:45; 4:32; Jas. 2:15-16; 1 John 3:17). However, the motivating principle for giving away one’s possessions might be pride rather than love.

Why do you think Paul tackled these issues before describing what love is?

Day 3: God's character is displayed in the qualities of love.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-5, noting the qualities of love.

The first two qualities describing love as patient and kind form a complementary pair. Patience here is not so much the willingness to wait as it is the endurance of offense without retaliation. Rather than repay evil for evil, love repays offense with kindness (see Col. 3:12-13).

Next, Paul issued a series of negated qualities that emphasize what love is not. Love does not envy and it does not boast. Love is not jealous to have something belonging to another, . Neither does love brag. Again, this would include boasting about status or spiritual gifts.

Love is not arrogant. Love never exalts itself above others; instead, it builds others up. Love is not rude. It does not behave improperly toward others. A foundational aspect of love is that it does not insist on its own way. Likewise, love is not irritable. It is not easily angered or provoked, ready to erupt. Love does not demand its own rights, nor is it touchy and defensive..

Love is not resentful. Literally, it “does not calculate the bad” and hold it against a person. Love doesn't keep a ledger of offenses for later reference. Just as the Lord does not count our sins against us once we are in Christ (see 2 Cor. 5:19), so also we should forgive and forget the offenses of others (see Matt. 18:21-22).

How do you see God's character in the description of love given by Paul?

Day 4: Love overcomes sin.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:6-7, underlining verse 7.

When Paul claimed that love does not rejoice at wrongdoing, he meant that those who belong to God take no satisfaction in sin. There is to be no association with professing Christians whose lives display a sinful lifestyle (1 Cor. 5:11), and there is certainly to be no rejoicing over sin. Instead, love sees sin for what it is, and seeks the remedy to overcome it.

Immediately, Paul offered a positive counterpart to this negative statement. He said, love rejoices with the truth. Instead of taking joy in unrighteousness, love takes joy in what is morally right and doctrinally sound. Bad behavior often follows bad beliefs. But love finds satisfaction in what is true, and in what follows—righteousness.

Finally, Paul summed up his description of love with a punchy series declaring what is always true about it: love bears ... believes ... hopes ... endures all things.

How does substituting the word “love” with “God” give you a better understanding of the relationship between the love defined by Paul and the character to God? What if your name was used instead?

Day 5: Love never ends.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:8-12, paying close attention to what things will come to an end.

Love is superior to spiritual gifts because of its lasting, permanent nature. Love never ends. As for prophecies and tongues and knowledge, Paul asserted that they will cease and pass away. The gifts are temporary; love is permanent.

The return of Christ will bring an end to the partial and usher in the perfect. Paul employed two illustrations to further make his point. First, he compared the partial character of spiritual gifts to the process of physical maturation. A child is not expected to remain a child forever, but to grow into adulthood. Second, Paul compared the partial nature of spiritual gifts to a seeing in a mirror dimly. The reflection is imperfect and only represents the full reality of what it projects. When the perfect comes, Paul anticipated seeing face to face. These illustrations are intended to clarify that the gifts are temporary, pointing to something greater, and also that love is permanent and remains forever.

As a believer, how can you make love your priority?

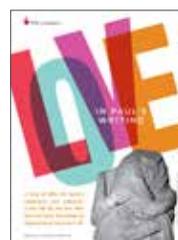
TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in 1 Corinthians 13, sharing with two other members of your Bible study group.

Share times in your life when you exercised your gift without love. What were the results?

What has God revealed about Himself to you in this study of love? What quality of love can you also now see is a characteristic of God?

How can you begin to show love to believers and unbelievers in your life that you may not have before? What do you think this could do



For additional context, read “Love’ in Paul’s Writings” and “QuickBites: Four Greek Terms for ‘Love’” in the Spring 2018 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

Session 9

Enjoying God's Comfort

Believers find comfort in knowing that others benefit from and God is honored through their trials.

2 Corinthians 1:3-14



What kinds of situations would you consider to be in your “comfort zone”? What things have you recently attempted that were “outside your comfort zone”? What are the advantages of staying in your comfort zone and of going outside your comfort zone?

Consider the different ways we use the phrase “comfort zone.” It can refer to a mental state in which people feel familiar with and in control of their circumstances. There’s also a negative sense for “comfort zone.” We may be urged to get out of our comfort zone—take risks, attempt things we’ve never done before.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

The opening chapters of this letter reveal quite a bit about the relationship between Paul and the Corinthian church, as well as some issues that had been going on since he wrote 1 Corinthians. The reminder that he was an apostle of Christ Jesus by God’s will (1:1) serves as an important prelude to a larger defense of his apostleship in this letter.

False apostles had made inroads into the church at Corinth and cast doubts on Paul’s authority because of his continual suffering and hardships. These false apostles became the target of Paul’s rebuke. His sufferings for Christ did not invalidate his status as an apostle. On the contrary, Paul indicated that all believers can expect affliction (1:7). Enjoying God’s comfort is the larger theme of the first chapter that flows from Paul’s suffering and affliction.

Paul’s travel schedule (2 Cor. 1:15–2:3,12-13) is not incidental but necessary to understand the context for the letter as a whole. After Paul founded the church, problems arose quickly, which he wrote about in a letter we do not have (see 1 Cor. 5:9). While in Ephesus, he heard about additional problems in the church and wrote 1 Corinthians to deal with them as well as other issues the Corinthians asked him to address. Apparently, the false apostles arrived during this time and caused more problems for Paul. In response, Paul left Ephesus for a brief visit to Corinth that didn’t go well, so he wrote a severe letter rebuking the church (see 2 Cor. 2:4; 7:8-9), which also we do not have. Paul postponed his plans for another visit, although still had it in view (see 2 Cor. 12:14; 13:1).

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-14

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our LORD Jesus Christ, the **Father of mercies** **A** and the God of all comfort.

4 He comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to **comfort** **B** those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves **receive from God** **C**.

5 For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so also through Christ our comfort **overflows** **D**. **6** If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation. If we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings that we suffer.

7 And our hope for you is firm, because we know that as you share in the sufferings, so you will also share in the comfort. **8** We don't want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of our affliction that took place in Asia. We were completely overwhelmed—beyond our strength—so that **we even despaired of life itself** **E**. **9** Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death, so that we would not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead.

10 He has delivered us from such a terrible death, and he will deliver us. We have put our hope in him that he will deliver us again **11** while you join in **helping us by your prayers** **F**. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gift that came to us through the prayers of many.

12 Indeed, this is our boast: The testimony of our conscience is that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you, with godly sincerity and purity, not by human wisdom but by God's grace.

13 For we are writing nothing to you other than what you can read and also understand. I hope you will understand completely—**14** just as you have partially understood us—that we are your reason for pride, just as you also are ours in the day of our LORD Jesus.

Passage Outline

Comforted (2 Cor. 1:3-7)

Tested (2 Cor. 1:8-11)

Accepted (2 Cor. 1:12-14)

Keywords

- a. Paul reveals God's nature. He gives, He blesses, and He cares. God's heart is for those who suffer, especially those who suffer for the faith.
- b. God never wastes a hurt. God's comfort, or empathy, leads to ministry involvement.
- c. God doesn't abandon His people (Heb. 13:5-6). His "grace is sufficient" in times of trouble and affliction (2 Cor. 12:9).
- d. This refers to the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit, as Jesus promised (John 14:26).
- e. God's people aren't immune from storms (Mark 4:35-41). Storms develop faith, character, and perseverance.
- f. Prayer is a vital ministry. The Lord's house is to be a house of prayer (Matt. 21:13). God moves when His people pray.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

God the Father is kind and compassionate toward His children. He provides for them and protects them, yet He does not withhold suffering and sorrow. Suffering, of course, has a purpose, not the least of which is to demonstrate the greatness of God's character toward us.

In addition, He is the God of all comfort. This affirmation grounds Paul's claim that God comforts us in all our affliction. Surely, Paul saw his share of affliction, but in every case he found comfort from the Lord. There is purpose behind the comfort we receive from God. Not only does God's comfort give us reason to praise Him, it is also so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction. Nothing is wasted in God's economy.

How might the sufferings of a believer be used by God to impact the lives of others? How does a person's attitude when facing suffering influence others? To what examples can you point to illustrate your response?

BIBLE SKILL: Use a Bible atlas and Bible dictionary (print version or on the Internet) to learn about places mentioned in Scripture. – Find the locations of Corinth and Ephesus, and the provinces of Asia and Macedonia in a Bible atlas. (Tip: check the atlas index or search on the Internet.) Then use a Bible dictionary to learn more about these places during the time of Paul. How do these places enter into an understanding of the background of 2 Corinthians? What motivated Paul to continue to plant churches in these areas knowing the difficulty he would face?

Paul could speak of the comfort he received from the Lord because he had been tested in the fires of affliction. Paul realized the immense spiritual value of afflictions, even the prospect of death for the gospel's sake. God delivered Paul from such a deadly peril. God spared his life and increased Paul's trust and confidence in Him. In fact, the apostle believed that as he continued the mission of the gospel, God would deliver him again. Not only did God increase Paul's trust in Him, he also increased his hope. As a result, Paul said, we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.

Why is hope such a powerful thing? How is the hope described by Paul different from wishful thinking?

Paul had lived his life above reproach, regardless of the slander the false apostles had lobbed at his character. His life and actions reflected holy motives, and his conduct was sincere—it held up to careful inspection. Of course, Paul wasn't boasting in himself or his own human wisdom to defend his actions. Rather, he admitted that anything good and praiseworthy was because of the •grace of God.

What is the relationship between a person's integrity and willingness to recognize or accept their role in kingdom work?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers can be comforted when facing sufferings because God is present and using those experiences to impact others.
- Believers can celebrate a testing of their faith, knowing that God will strengthen them and demonstrate His power.
- Believers can recognize the work of God in and through others, accepting them as co-laborers.

Discuss with your group ways God is encouraging your group members through someone who is suffering and the way they are facing that suffering. What can your group do to be encouragers to others?

How is God testing your faith? What are you learning about Him and yourself through that test? Who can encourage you through your difficulty?

With whom can you share insights you gained from this lesson? How can you share those insights in an encouraging way?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: God will comfort us through any sufferings.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, identifying how Paul describes God.

Paul also described God as the Father of mercies. He is merciful and compassionate by His very nature (Ex. 34:6-7). Paul told the Ephesians, God is “rich in mercy” (Eph. 2:4). In addition, He is the God of all comfort. Surely, Paul saw his share of affliction, but in every case he found comfort from the Lord. Paul wanted the Corinthians to know that the suffering he had undergone for the gospel had provided an opportunity for God to comfort him. As a result, he was able to comfort them.

Both affliction and comfort in Paul’s life would be useful for the Corinthians’ comfort for two reasons. First, it was for their salvation. Paul didn’t mean his sufferings were the grounds for their salvation, since only Jesus died for sins. Rather, Paul’s afflictions occurred because he preached the gospel by which they were saved. If Paul had tried to avoid persecution and suffering for spreading the gospel, many Gentiles (including the Corinthians) would not have heard and received salvation. Second, Paul’s comfort became their comfort and would produce in them patient endurance.

How might your sufferings be used by God to impact the lives of others?

How have you seen your attitude when facing suffering influence others?

Day 2: We can rely on God through our sufferings.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:8-9, noticing how Paul drew attention to the suffering he had experienced.

Paul didn’t want the Corinthians to be unaware of the affliction he experienced in Asia. Paul gave no specifics on what happened to him. Although Paul didn’t mention the specifics, he did describe the severity of his afflictions. He and his companions were so utterly burdened beyond their strength. In fact, Paul despaired of life itself. The word for despaired literally means “out of passageway.” He considered his sufferings so bad that there was no exit, no way out from them.

Paul realized the immense spiritual value of afflictions, even the prospect of death for the gospel’s sake. The purpose behind his afflictions was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. God’s grace is sufficient to lead us into greater trust in Him through times of testing (see 2 Cor. 12:9-10).

What type of attitude did Paul demonstrate while he was suffering?

What type of attitude do you usually demonstrate while suffering?

Day 3: We can support others in their sufferings through prayer.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:10-11, paying close attention to verse 11.

Paul knew that God would deliver him through any trial or test or circumstance until the time for him to enter God's heavenly kingdom (see 2 Tim. 4:18). Not only did God increase Paul's trust in Him, he also increased his hope. As a result, Paul said, we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. The focus of Paul's hope was not deliverance, but God Himself, in whom he had learned to trust.

There's another facet of Paul's hope and confidence during times of affliction, and that was the awareness that God's people were praying for him. He counted on the Corinthians to join in helping him endure by offering prayers on his behalf. He asked the Ephesians to pray that God would give him boldness to preach the gospel (Eph. 6:19-20). He said confidently to the Philippians that his own deliverance would come through their prayers for him (Phil. 1:19).

As those intercessory prayers were answered, and Paul saw deliverance in times of testing and affliction, many would give thanks on Paul's behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many. Indeed, there is great cause for rejoicing and thanksgiving when God answers prayer. But Paul was not soliciting prayers for his own selfish reasons, rather for the benefit of others as God's grace reached more people for His glory (2 Cor. 4:15). Paul's desire was for God to be honored, which would lead the Corinthians to give thanks to Him.

How has hope sustained you? What role has prayer played in sustaining that hope?

Day 4: It is by the grace of God that we do anything good.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:12, noting the phrase "by God's grace."

Paul began his letter by identifying himself as "an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God" (2 Cor. 1:1). Because of the negative influence of false apostles in the Corinthian church, Paul wanted his readers to accept him as one who had proven himself among them. He wasn't interested in their validation of his apostleship, but rather their acceptance of him as a source of pride and joy in bringing them the gospel.

His conduct in the world and toward them was proven by simplicity and godly sincerity. Paul had lived his life above reproach, regardless of the slander the false apostles had lobbed at his character. His life and actions reflected holy motives, and his conduct was sincere.

Of course, Paul wasn't boasting in himself or his own human wisdom to defend his actions. Rather, he admitted that anything good and praiseworthy was because of the grace of God.

When you look at your life, how have you seen God demonstrate His grace in your life? How does the awareness of His grace impact your attitude toward Him and others?

Day 5: Believers can be proud of God working through them.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:13-14, identifying Paul's reason for pride.

Paul's integrity was at stake, it seems. And perhaps, the love he had for the Corinthians was being questioned as well (see 2 Cor. 2:4; 1 Cor. 16:24). He marveled that even though he had poured himself into this church and loved them as a father in the faith, they still only partially understood him and his ministry among them. Their relationship had seen its share of ups and downs, but reconciliation was evident (see 2 Cor. 7).

Paul concluded this section by telling the Corinthians: you will boast of us. They should reject the disparaging remarks of the false apostles and recall the sincerity and purity of Paul's ministry among them. Even more, they should have defended Paul and boasted about the work of God through him in Corinth and beyond.

What would be a greater source of pride—being a person of integrity or being recognized by others for the work you do? Explain.

TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in 2 Corinthians 1, sharing with two other members of your Bible study group.

When have you needed comfort due to suffering? What truths did you learn through this passage that you can draw on during future times of suffering?

How is God testing you? What is He teaching you so far through this test?

How do you see God working in and through the others in this group?



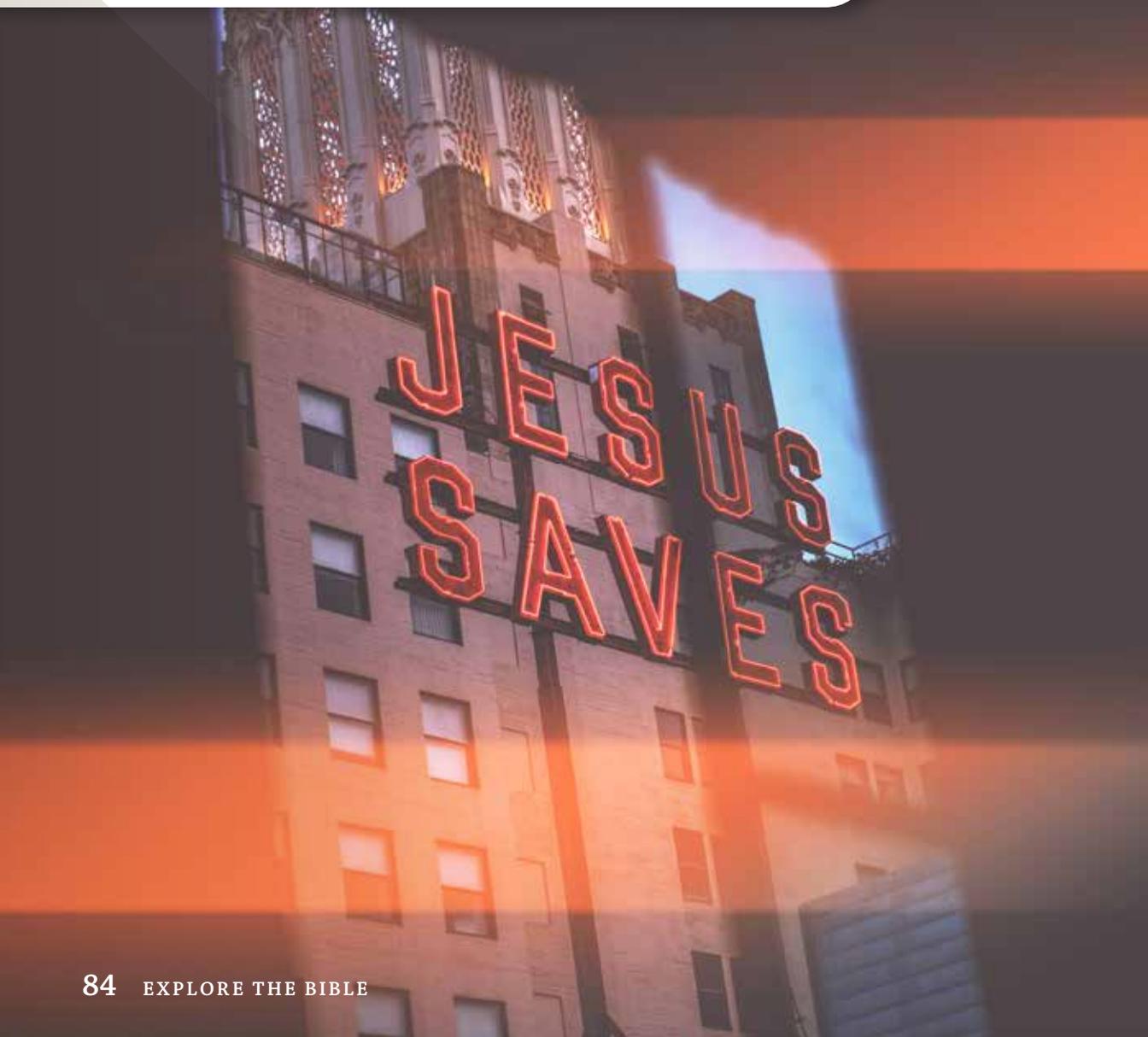
For additional context, read "Comfort: A Word Study," available digitally in the Spring 2018 *Biblical Illustrator* for Explore the Bible at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

Session 10

Displaying the Gospel

Believers can face life with confidence, knowing that the power of the gospel will be revealed.

2 Corinthians 4:5-18



Do you agree or disagree that religious liberty is declining? Explain your answer. What actions should be taken in places where Christianity is actively persecuted or suppressed?

LifeWay Research surveyed Americans about their perceptions regarding religious liberty. Sixty percent of those surveyed agreed with the statement, “Religious liberty is on the decline in America.” Almost two-thirds (63%) agreed with the statement, “American Christians face growing intolerance.” Religious liberty has become an increasingly contentious issue in American culture.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Christianity was not tolerated as a legal religion anywhere in the Roman Empire of the first century. Thus, when Paul and other apostles wrote to encourage believers who faced persecution, he was dealing with a much more challenging cultural situation than any of us has faced.

Paul began his letter by reminding the Corinthians of the afflictions he had endured for the sake of the gospel (2 Cor. 1:3-11). Such afflictions, he said, actually benefited the Corinthians and brought them comfort and encouragement in their troubles. Paul’s purpose was broader in scope, however. He was defending his apostleship and authority against some people who were criticizing him on account of his persistent sufferings (chaps. 10–11).

Although false teachers were fleecing the Corinthian believers financially through deceitful means (11:5-15), Paul reminded them how he labored among them “free of charge” (11:7) so that it wouldn’t appear as if he was marketing “the word of God for profit” (2:17). He had no need to seek a commendation from them, to prove himself to them again, since they themselves were his “letters of recommendation” (3:1). His apostolic ministry was adequate because God had made him competent as a minister of the new covenant in Christ (3:5-6).

In this week’s Scripture passage, Paul was still dealing with these two interconnected issues: his sufferings and the question of his apostolic ministry. Indeed, he would commend himself and his co-laborers “to everyone’s conscience by an open display of the truth” (2 Cor. 4:2). Paul’s main agenda in these verses was to call the Corinthians to join him in displaying the gospel in their proclamation, their lives, and their focus for the glory of God in Christ.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:5-18

5 For we are not proclaiming ourselves but Jesus Christ as LORD, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus's sake. **6** For God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ. **7** Now we have this **treasure in clay jars A**, so that this **extraordinary power B** may be from God and not from us. **8** We are afflicted in every way but not crushed; we are perplexed but not in despair; **9** we are **persecuted but not abandoned C**; we are struck down but not destroyed. **10** We always carry the death of Jesus in our body, so that the life of Jesus may also be displayed in our body. **11** For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus's sake, so that Jesus's life may also be displayed in our mortal flesh. **12** So then, death is at work in us, but life in you. **13** And since we have the same spirit of faith in keeping with what is written, **I believed, therefore I spoke D**, we also believe, and therefore speak. **14** For we know that the one who raised the LORD Jesus will also **raise us with Jesus E** and present us with you. **15** Indeed, everything is for your benefit so that, as **grace F** extends through more and more people, it may cause thanksgiving to increase to the glory of God. **16** Therefore we do not give up. Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day. **17** For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. **18** So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Passage Outline

Proclaim (2 Cor. 4:5-6)

Live (2 Cor 4:7-15)

Focus (2 Cor. 4:16-18)

Keywords

- a. God uses forgiven people to share history's greatest message. Salvation's story has been trusted to the hands of unworthy, frail servants of Jesus Christ.
- b. The gospel changes lives. We're called to share the good news and leave the results to God.
- c. Preaching the cross is costly, but God is faithful. He will never abandon His servants (Heb. 13:5).
- d. Psalm 116:10 flowed from Paul's heart and lips, professing a unity of suffering.
- e. Preaching the message of the cross and resurrection is foundational to the faith. Paul talked about Jesus' victory over death and the grave and the promised gathering in heaven.
- f. God's unmerited favor. His grace saves (Eph. 2:8-9), equips (2 Tim. 2:1), and sustains (2 Cor. 12:9).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Although Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy (2 Cor. 1:19) were worthy of commendation for their ministry to the Corinthians, Paul insisted, what we proclaim is not ourselves. It seems the false apostles were boasting about themselves, and at the same time preaching “another Jesus” (11:4). Paul and his colleagues had no need to proclaim themselves; they proclaimed Jesus Christ as Lord.

What are the implications and consequences for proclaiming someone or something other than salvation in Christ alone?

BIBLE SKILL: Observe when and for what purpose a New Testament passage included Old Testament quotations. – Paul quoted Genesis 1:3 in 2 Corinthians 4:6 and Psalm 116:10 in 2 Corinthians 4:13. Read the entire Old Testament chapter for each quotation. How does the context of the verse quoted help you better understand why Paul quoted that passage? What factors are the same or similar? How do the quoted passages help you better understand Jesus and the gospel?

Paul’s afflictions for the gospel provided an opportunity for his opponents to cast doubt on the power of God in his life and ministry. But Paul boasted in his weaknesses and sufferings as markers for the power of God to be shown more clearly in his life. In every situation, God’s strength and grace are sufficient. Paul may have been knocked down, so to speak, but he wasn’t knocked out. There was no defeat because God’s extraordinary power was at work. He was willing to endure suffering not only for the benefit of the Corinthians, but for the salvation of the lost wherever the Lord sent him.

How would Paul define a win for himself? For other believers? How should believers understand success in this life?

KEY DOCTRINE: God’s Purpose of Grace. – Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end.

Paul reminded the Corinthians about the purpose and result of suffering. Nothing is wasted in God’s economy; nothing is accidental in God’s careful plans for us. God is producing something far better than we can understand in the moment of suffering. Paul asserted that God is producing an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison—that we be conformed into the image of Jesus. God’s purpose for us, and the glory that awaits us, is that we will be like Jesus.

How does the glory reserved for us in the future serve as motivation in the now to be faithful and courageous in suffering?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers are to exclusively proclaim Jesus.
- All people can live victoriously through faith in the resurrected Jesus.
- Believers are to focus on things with eternal consequences.

What actions do you need to take to safeguard against proclaiming anyone other than Jesus? Discuss with the group ways you can hold each other accountable for making Jesus the focus of our message.

Evaluate your level of dependence upon Jesus when facing difficulties. What actions do you need to take to improve that dependence? What attitudes toward difficulties need to be adjusted based on this study?

Ask God to increase your focus on eternal things rather than temporary things. Pray for His Spirit to remove specific areas in your life that distract you and hinder you. Record what He reveals to you.

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: We are servants of Christ.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:5, identifying who we should be proclaiming.

In his previous letter, Paul declared to know nothing among them “except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2) because there was no other foundation upon which to build than Jesus himself (1 Cor. 3:11). Yet Paul did promote himself and his co-workers in the ministry as servants for Jesus’ sake. In other letters, Paul defined himself first as a servant of Christ before establishing his apostleship (see Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:1). As a servant of Christ, he was not concerned about himself but about His master and His master’s business.

Paul could not allow the Corinthians to miss this point. He wrote to them earlier, “This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Cor. 4:1). In fact, when addressing issues of division in the Corinthian church, Paul asked: “What then is Apollos? What is Paul?” His answer was clear and simple: “Servants through whom you believed” (1 Cor. 3:5).

What are the personal implications and consequences if you proclaim someone or something other than salvation in Christ alone?

Day 2: We should shine the light of Jesus as we proclaim His name.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:6, paying attention to the use of the word light.

What is God’s illuminating work in our hearts? It is bringing the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Paul’s amazing statement here is tethered to a larger discussion in context, and draws on something he said earlier about the old covenant ministry of Moses. Notice in 2 Corinthians 3:7-13 that the Israelites were unable to look at Moses when he came down from Mount Sinai because God’s glory was on his face (see Ex. 34:29-35). They had to keep his face veiled.

In contrast, Paul said that God’s glory wasn’t merely on Jesus’ face, but it was in his face! Moses reflected God’s glory; Jesus is God’s glory! The writer of Hebrews says, “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (Heb 1:3). Jesus is “the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4). Moses’ face was veiled, but Jesus’ face is shining brightly to overcome the darkness of our hearts. Paul declared that he didn’t proclaim Moses, since the old covenant that came through him still veils the hearts of those who claim him. Paul didn’t proclaim himself either, or anyone else for that matter. Christ alone is the One to proclaim.

How does the light of Jesus shining through us impact how you view sharing opportunities?

Day 3: God's power is displayed in our weaknesses.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-15, identifying the purpose of weakness.

The “gospel of the glory of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:4) is a treasure we have in clay jars. The treasure is valuable and costly; the jars are weak and common. It is the weakness of the vessel, Paul argued, that allows this extraordinary power to be shown as belonging to God and not to us. The Christian life is marked by suffering and sometimes by the threat of death. We ought to expect this because Jesus told His followers they would experience it (see Matt. 10:16-24).

The key to living confidently and faithfully as followers of Christ in situations that appear to destroy us is this: “your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3). We live confidently because we “rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead” (2 Cor. 1:9). All of this—whether life, suffering, or death—was for the benefit of others. As the gospel advanced and afflictions increased, Paul concluded that God’s power displayed in his weaknesses would lead to increased gratitude. God is glorified through faithful and grateful dependence on Him and His power.

As a believer, how should you understand success in this life?

Day 4: Daily renewal is transforming us into the image of Christ.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:16, circling the word renewed.

When difficulties and afflictions arise, it’s easy to lose heart. Paul called his readers to focus on higher truths and greater realities based on the grace and mercy of the Lord. So, he said, we do not lose heart. If Jesus’ life and death—His glory—is the treasure we carry in the clay jars of our lives, then we have so much more to live for. If God is able to raise the dead (and He is), then we find confidence to carry on. This is the second time Paul said we do not give up. In 2 Corinthians 4:1, he appealed to God’s mercy and the stewardship of his ministry as other reasons why he didn’t quit on the gospel.

Even though our outer self is wasting away, there is more to life than our physical bodies. Our body is temporary, an “earthly home” that is wearing out (5:1). But our inner person is being renewed day by day. Let this be our focus! God has shone in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of His glory in Jesus Christ (4:6), and that glory is transforming us into the image of Christ.

How does your inner person get renewed daily? How does that daily renewal fuel and motivate you as a believer?

Day 5: We walk by faith.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:17-18, paying close attention to verse 17.

Paul minimized affliction when compared to what God has in store for us in glory. Paul asserted that God is producing an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. What is this amazing weight of glory?

The gospel we have received is not veiled, but its full glory is on display. Jesus Christ, the image of God and the glory of God, is shining brightly in our hearts overcoming sin and death. We are poised to share in God's glory if we are prepared to share in His sufferings (Rom. 8:17). First John 3:2 states that when Jesus appears "we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."

This is the eternal weight of glory—that we be conformed into the image of Jesus. In the final analysis, Paul said we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For now, it is enough for us to "walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7).

How does the glory reserved for you in the future serve as motivation today to be faithful and courageous in suffering?

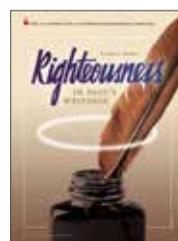
TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in 2 Corinthians 4, sharing with two other members of your Bible study group.

As you share the gospel this week, how can you faithfully proclaim Christ instead of yourself? Reflect on if your testimony focuses more on you or on Christ's work in your life.

How has God renewed you in the past week? How does that renewal impact your openness to being used by God?

Discuss ways God challenged your motivations? What new motivations have surfaced as a result?



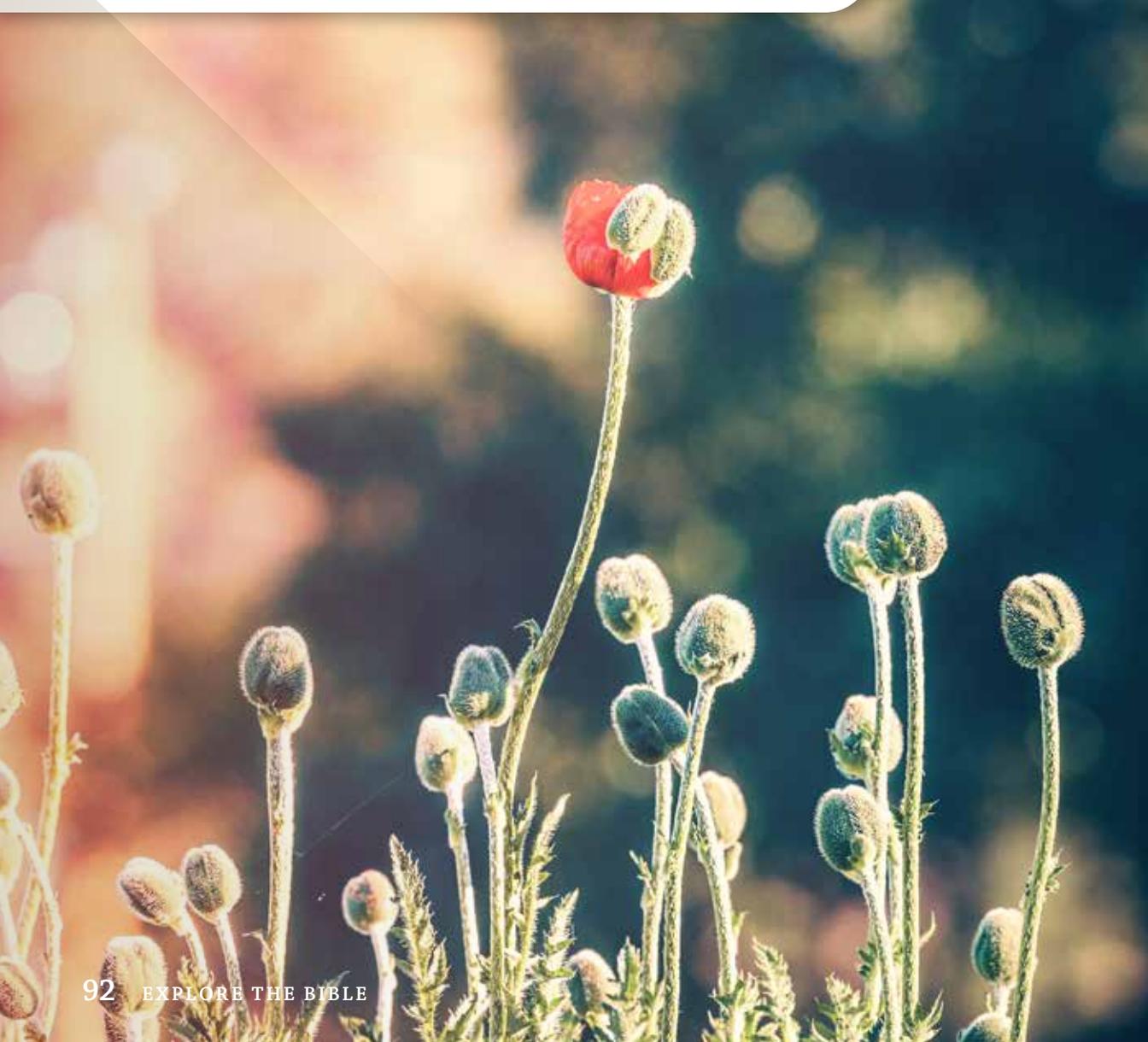
For additional context, read "'Righteousness' in Paul's Writings" in the Spring 2018 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

Session 11

Becoming New

Believers faithfully represent Christ by living as new creations reconciled to Him.

2 Corinthians 5:16-21; 6:1-2



Can any broken relationship be fixed? Explain. How does the restoring of a once broken relationship change the people who were at odds with each other?

Humans are relational by nature. Some of the greatest joys in life are found in healthy relationships. On the other hand, a broken or lost relationship can send us into depression or desperation. The closer the relationship, the greater the hurt if broken.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Understanding affliction in the Christian life has been a key theme from Paul in this letter to the Corinthians. One of the reasons why believers “do not give up” (2 Cor. 4:16) is because we trust that our momentary afflictions will produce an “absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory” (4:17) in heaven. Christians can expect the temporary “earthly tent” of their bodies to be replaced with “an eternal dwelling in the heavens, not made with hands” (5:1).

This truth, of course, leads us to desire to be “away from the body and at home with the Lord”—but until that happens, “we make it our aim to be pleasing to him” (5:8-9). Why? Because, as Paul stated, “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ to be repaid” for the things we’ve “done in the body, whether good or evil” (5:10).

Because judgment is approaching, Paul insisted that “we try to persuade people” (5:11). Not only on account of judgment, but also because “the love of Christ compels us” (5:14), our aim should be to convince people to live as those who have been reconciled by God. If Jesus died for all, then “those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for the one who died for them and was raised” (5:15).

Living for Christ means living a life of holy separation from the world (6:14-18). If we are to be held accountable for the things we’ve done in our body, both good and evil, then “let us cleanse ourselves from every impurity of flesh and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God” (7:1). Yet none of this is possible unless we’ve become new creations, having been reconciled to God through Christ’s sacrifice.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:16-21; 6:1-2

16 From now on, then, we do not know anyone from a worldly perspective. Even if we have known Christ from a worldly perspective, yet now we no longer know him in this way. **17** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, **the new has come** **A**!

18 Everything is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. **19** That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, **not counting their trespasses** **B** against them, and he has committed the **message of reconciliation** **C** to us. **20** Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us. We **plead** **D** on Christ's behalf: "Be reconciled to God."

21 He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. ... **6:1 Working together** **E** with him, we also appeal to you, "Don't receive the grace of God in vain." **2** For he says: At an acceptable time I listened to you, and in the day of salvation I helped you. See, now is the acceptable time; **now** **F** is the day of salvation!

Passage Outline

Reborn (2 Cor. 5:16-17)

Reconciled (2 Cor. 5:18-21)

Ready (2 Cor. 6:1-2)

Keywords

- a. A beautiful picture of salvation—knowing Christ isn't self-improvement but spiritual transformation.
- b. God's forgiveness is the act of God showing grace to forget forever and not hold His people accountable for their sins.
- c. Sharing the gospel is commanded, not optional (Matt. 28:19-20). Jesus has called His followers to be His witnesses (Acts 1:8).
- d. Our emotions are present in speaking the gospel. We need to extend evangelistic invitations with passion and urgency.
- e. One result of salvation is Christian service (Eph. 2:10). God calls and gifts His children for ministry involvement (1 Cor. 12:1).
- f. Tomorrow isn't guaranteed (Jas. 4:13-17). Salvation is about spiritual and eternal deliverance.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Compelled by the love of Christ, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to see people through a spiritual lens. Paul's desire was to see grace extend through more people, which would not happen if those same people were thought of according to worldly standards. Sadly, the Corinthian church had been infiltrated by false teachers who prioritized external things.

Everything and everyone must be viewed through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Being saved, or born again, means that believers are now in Christ. At the same time, Christ is said to be in us (see Gal. 2:20). Union with Christ involves both aspects, revealing a complementary relationship between our being in Christ and Him dwelling in us.

What are the benefits of being united with Christ? How does being united with Christ change how a person lives daily?

Paul provided a reminder of God's initiation in our redemption, saying simply, All this is from God. From the death of Jesus and its saving benefits, to the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Spirit, to reconciliation, to the judgment seat of Christ—God is the One who began the good work in believers and will bring it to completion in Christ (see Phil 1:6). Paul's emphasis was that God reconciled sinners to Himself through Christ. We have been brought near to God by the blood of Christ; the cross is where reconciliation and peace have been won and achieved (see Eph. 2:13-16). All of this is from God—He initiated it, He achieved it, He applied it to our lives.

What does God's initiating this reconciliation reveal about God's love for humans?

As amazing as our reconciliation with God is, Paul added more: God is making his appeal through us. It is the proclamation of the gospel that God uses to save others. How will people be saved unless they hear the gospel for themselves (Rom. 10:14)? God "entrusted to us the message of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19), and we are ambassadors for Christ. Believers are messengers for and representatives of the One who sent them.

How does being reconciled to God qualify a person to be an ambassador for the reconciliation available to others?

Paul directed the Corinthians to recognize the urgency of one's response to the gospel message of reconciliation with God. People must be ready to act on God's offer while the opportunity is available to them. The message of reconciliation with God is too important to overlook or push off for another time. The Corinthians, and all who hear this gracious gospel message, should be ready so as to not receive the grace of God in vain.

What are some reasons people may give for waiting to accept the gospel?

What can a believer do to emphasize to others the urgency for accepting Christ?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Only through faith in Christ can a person be made new and move away from what he or she once was.
- Only through faith in Christ can a person be reconciled to God.
- All people must act on God's offer while the opportunity is available to them.

Take time to evaluate your life, looking for “old” things you still struggle to put off. Ask God to help you live in light of the new life He offers through His Son.

As a group, discuss how people seek to become reconciled with God on their own terms. What actions can your group take to help others know that reconciliation with God only comes through faith in Jesus?

Pray that God help you see people as others in need of the gospel. Ask Him to help you see them through a spiritual lens with the urgency of the gospel. With whom do you need to make an urgent effort to share Jesus?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Everyone must be viewed through the lens of the gospel.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-17, noting how as believers we no longer have a worldly perspective.

The body was not unimportant to Paul. He proclaimed the resurrection of an incorruptible, immortal, image-bearing body in the likeness of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:50-55). Perhaps this rejection of seeing others from a worldly perspective was Paul's response to the accusations that his sufferings cast doubt on his authoritative status among the Corinthians.

The same goes for knowing Christ, said Paul. We once regarded Christ according to the flesh, he claimed, we regard him thus no longer. Paul formerly viewed Jesus according to the flesh. He considered Jesus just a man, a teacher who claimed to be the Messiah, yet a rebel against Judaism, worthy of condemnation. After Jesus met Paul on the road to Damascus and changed his life, Paul knew Him differently—as the Son of God, Messiah, and risen Lord. Spiritual rebirth transforms a worldly perspective about Jesus and about others.

Everything and everyone must be viewed through the gospel of Jesus Christ. For those who are saved, who are in Christ, everything has changed.

How does being united with Christ change how you live daily? To what evidence can you point as proof?

Day 2: Believers are made new through Christ.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17, identifying how one becomes a new creation.

Anyone who trusts Jesus Christ for salvation is a new creation. Again, what is external isn't important compared to this reality. Paul said to the Galatians, "For both circumcision and uncircumcision mean nothing; what matters instead is a new creation" (Gal. 6:15).

Because of the regenerating work of God in saving us and giving us new birth, the old has passed away. Paul told the Romans, "our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin" (Rom. 6:6). The old self that we used to be—with the old desires, inclinations, pursuits, and goals—has been transformed and replaced by the new that has come in Christ. We now have new desires, goals, and purposes because of the gospel. Born again by the Spirit, having trusted in Christ, we have put off the old and put on the new.

What actions and characteristics point to a person being made new as a result of faith in Jesus? How are those actions and characteristics seen in you?

Day 3: We are reconciled to God through Christ.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, considering the ministry of reconciliation.

It is God who through Christ reconciled us to himself. The clear testimony of Scripture is that our sin has created a barrier between us and God (see Isa. 59:2). Reconciliation is the restoration of a relationship that has been broken or severed; it is the reunion of parties separated by the consequences of sin or wrongdoing. Paul's emphasis was that God reconciled sinners to Himself through Christ.

The Corinthians needed to know and appreciate that God's reconciling work was not isolated to them alone, but that God was reconciling the world to himself. God's work through Jesus was not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him (John 3:17).

How should the love God demonstrated by reconciling you to Him motivate you to serve Him?

BIBLE SKILL: Notice repeated words or phrases in a Bible passage. – Biblical writers sometimes used repetition of key words to emphasize a theme or message. Paul used word repetition in this session's passage. Identify the term (verb and noun) he used five times in 2 Corinthians 5:18-21. Think about what this repetition helps communicate in the overall passage. Look also at the other times the apostle used forms of this term in his letters (Rom. 5:10-11; 11:15; Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20-22). What significance does this repeated term have for believers today?

Day 4: We are ambassadors for Christ.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:20-21, noting our job as believers.

It is incredible to think that "we are God's coworkers" (1 Cor. 3:9). He assigned us the responsibilities to plant and water, but He gives the growth. Reconciliation is still from God. He alone can forgive our sins and restore us to Himself. But in light of receiving that reconciliation, we are commanded to take action on His behalf.

Jesus did not know sin; He lived a righteous life in full obedience to God the Father. Our sins and punishment were laid upon Him, even though He didn't deserve it. If we are in Christ, God doesn't count our trespasses against us because Jesus became sin on our behalf. In Christ, we become the righteousness of God. Paul appealed again to our union with Christ. We have been reconciled to God and entrusted with the message of reconciliation as ambassadors for Christ.

What responsibilities do you as an ambassador carry and how do those responsibilities inform you of God's expectations for you?

Day 5: We must share the urgency of the gospel.

Read 2 Corinthians 6:1-2, circling the word now.

Paul applied the words of Isaiah 49:8 to his own time. In the original setting, the Lord was speaking of a time of restoration after the captivity of Israel. That time would be called the day of salvation. To Isaiah's first hearers, these words offered the hope of restoration after a time of judgment. The Lord promised in Isaiah 49:8 "to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages." Paul believed that this time of salvation had arrived with the coming of Jesus Christ. No longer was this an unfulfilled promise; it had arrived now. There could be no delay in responding to the good news.

The urgent message of reconciliation was pressed upon the Corinthians. Jesus' reconciling work on the cross was indeed for the world, but the Corinthians must receive it for themselves. Hearing about but doing nothing with the saving work of Jesus Christ would be a tragic omission.

What can you do to emphasize to others the urgency for accepting Christ?

TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in 2 Corinthians 5 and 6, sharing with two other members of your Bible study group.

Paul explained that believers are made different by the Holy Spirit. How does this change cause you to regard other believers?

How were you changed through Christ? As a changed person, what are your responsibilities in regards to sharing the gospel with others?

Discuss ways of impressing the urgency of accepting Christ. How does the urgency impact how you share Jesus?



For additional context, read "Reconciliation: The Heart of Second Corinthians" and "'Righteousness' in Paul's Writings" in the Spring 2018 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

Session 12

Giving Faithfully

Believers show trust in God by using their resources to meet the needs of others.

2 Corinthians 9:1-15



Why might a person question someone being generous? What motivates people to be generous toward others?

The man wore everyday clothes with no designer names attached. Nothing about him indicated he was wealthy. He seemed to be just like any other customer sitting in the café. After eating his meal, he thanked the waitress and left her a tip that was larger than his bill. Another person at the table commented about his tip. The man reminded the person that one doesn't need to be rich to be generous, but that one simply must be generous to be generous.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

God uses money to expose the condition of our hearts. Jesus made statements like, "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21) and "you cannot serve both God and money" (Matt. 6:24). Paul said, "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Tim. 6:10). Christians should view money through a different lens. Rather than being greedy and grabbing all we can get, we should be generous and give to others in need.

To understand this week's Bible passage, it is important to recall that the Jerusalem church faced significant challenges, including heavy financial burdens for ministry among the poor. The believers in the Jerusalem church did their part to share and support each other financially (Acts 2:44-45), yet more was needed. A famine hit Judea that added to the need, and churches sent gifts to the Jerusalem believers by way of Barnabas and Saul (Acts 11:30).

When Paul first met James, Peter, and John in Jerusalem, they asked him to "remember the poor." Paul "made every effort to do" so (Gal. 2:10). Wherever he went, he levied his apostolic influence to raise money in support of the needy saints in Jerusalem. Why? Because Gentile believers were indebted to the Jerusalem church, the epicenter from which the gospel spread into the world. Paul said to the Romans, "For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual benefits, then they are obligated to minister to them in material needs" (Rom. 15:27).

In 1 Corinthians, Paul encouraged the Corinthian believers to take up a collection for the believers in Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1). He wanted this to be ready when he came (1 Cor. 16:2). Apparently, however, tensions between the Corinthians and Paul, as well as the negative influence of the false teachers, hindered the collection and halted giving. So Paul reengaged the issue, bragging on the Macedonian churches for their generosity and calling the Corinthians to recommit themselves to giving to this need (2 Cor. 8:1-15).

2 CORINTHIANS 9:1-15

1 Now concerning the ministry to the saints, it is unnecessary for me to write to you. **2** For I know your eagerness, and I boast about you to the Macedonians: “Achaia has been ready since last year,” and your zeal has stirred up most of them. **3** But I am sending the brothers so that our **boasting** **A** about you in this matter would not prove empty, and so that you would be ready just as I said. **4** Otherwise, if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we, not to mention you, would be put to shame in that situation. **5** Therefore I considered it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and **arrange in advance** **B** the generous gift you promised, so that it will be ready as a gift and not as an extortion. **6** The point is this: The person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the person who **sows generously will also reap generously** **C**. **7** Each person should do as he has decided in his heart—not reluctantly or out of compulsion, since God loves a cheerful giver. **8** And God is able to make every grace overflow to you, so that in every way, always having everything you need, you may excel in every good work. **9** As it is written: He distributed freely; he gave to the poor; his righteousness endures forever. **10** Now the one who provides seed for the sower and bread for food will also provide and multiply your seed and increase the harvest of your righteousness. **11** You will be enriched in every way for all generosity, which produces thanksgiving to God through us. **12** For the ministry of this service is not only **supplying the needs** **D** of the saints but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. **13** Because of the proof provided by this ministry, they will glorify God for your **obedient confession** **E** of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone. **14** And as they pray on your behalf, they will have deep affection for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you. **15** Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Passage Outline

Confidence Expressed
(2 Cor. 9:1-5)

Benefits Found
(2 Cor. 9:6-11)

Adoration Gained
(2 Cor. 9:12-15)

Keywords

- a. The Corinthian believers were prepared, ready, and eager to obey. Disciple-making was alive and well.
- b. Effective ministry demands reliance on the Holy Spirit and seasons of preparation.
- c. An inseparable relationship exists between sowing and reaping (Gal. 6:7-8). Generous giving blesses others and the one giving. Reaping a harvest requires sowing seeds.
- d. The offering wasn't only about money. It was a witness, meeting physical needs and spreading the message about generosity for God's glory.
- e. Evidence existed of conversion. Faith and works complimented one another (Jas. 2:14-26).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Paul expressed his confidence about the Corinthians' participation in the ministry to the saints. His belief was that the Corinthians would step up in their promised support for the believers in Jerusalem. In fact, Paul commented about their readiness to complete the collection. Paul wanted to certify whether the Corinthians would have the collection ready when he came. Huge ministry needs were at stake, and people were counting on it since Paul had been boasting about the strong commitment from the Corinthians. If, in fact, they were not prepared, both Paul and the Corinthians would be humiliated.

Why is it important for leaders to hold believers accountable for meeting the needs of others?

Paul's driving point was, if you give little, you gain little. This principle is not a "health and wealth" proposition but rather a biblical truth flowing from the generous nature of God. We are to give unselfishly, but it is right for us to be reminded that giving is in our own best interest. Giving should be proportionate to one's means, yet sacrificial (2 Cor. 8:12). Paul also noted that giving is to be voluntary and not under compulsion.

For the cheerful giver, which comes first, the gift or the cheer? Explain.

BIBLE SKILL: Connect Old Testament teaching to New Testament

significance. – Read Psalm 112 and take note of the traits of the righteous person that the psalmist described. Then read 2 Corinthians 9 and observe how Paul applied the words of the psalm to Christians. How do the words of the psalm support what Paul wrote concerning generous giving?

Sharing in the support of the poor means sharing in the blessings the Lord returns for that effort. If the Corinthians gave to the needy, God would make sure they were taken care of. When we place others' needs before our own comfort and gain, we demonstrate the same kind of humble, sacrificial love of our Savior.

What is the relationship between trust in God and one's willingness to give to meet the needs of others?

Paul noted that the surpassing grace of God at work in the Corinthians would also be a source of gratitude in the hearts of the Jerusalem saints. All Christian giving is carried out in light of God's gift to us—an incredible, priceless, generous gift. God loved the world and gave us His Son (John 3:16).

In what ways does God's generosity in the gift of His Son challenge believers to meet the needs of others?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers are accountable to provide for the needs of others.
- Believers demonstrate trust in God’s provisions for them by giving to meet the needs of others.
- Believers’ gifts can be a means of honoring God for both the giver and the receiver.

As a group, discuss appropriate ways of challenging each other to meet the needs of others in the community and to meet the needs of the church. What adjustments need to be made within the group based on this discussion?

Ask God to show you a need that you are to meet. Ask Him for the courage and faith to address that need. Record your actions here.

List attitudes you discovered about giving in this study. Evaluate how well you exhibit the attitudes you identified. Ask God to strengthen these attitudes in your life, committing to take action as He directs.

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: We are accountable for helping others.

Read 2 Corinthians 9:1-5, noting the importance of accountability.

Paul had been boasting about the Corinthians' readiness to the people of Macedonia, and the Corinthians' zeal had stirred up the Macedonians to get involved as well. According to Romans 15:26, Macedonia and Achaia (where Corinth was located) were faithful to collect money for those in Jerusalem.

To ensure all was as it should be, Paul said he was sending the brothers so that his boasting about them may not prove empty. These brothers included Titus and two other unnamed brothers, but known by the Corinthians, who had proven themselves faithful (2 Cor. 8:16-24). Paul was urging the brothers to go on ahead and make sure that the gift they promised would be ready.

Paul was concerned that if the gift was not ready when he arrived, and he held them to their pledge, their giving would no longer be offered as a gift but would feel like an extortion because of the pressure. However, these verses reveal the confidence Paul had in the Corinthians to make good on their promise to give.

Why is it important for you to be held accountable for meeting the needs of others?

Day 2: We should give cheerfully.

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-7, identifying what cheerful giving entails.

Paul's motivation was not the receiving or reaping but rather the blessed act of giving itself. Paul appealed elsewhere to Jesus' teaching on this subject, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Giving demonstrates the genuineness of love (2 Cor. 8:8,24). In fact, it was love that motivated God to give His Son (John 3:16).

Giving should be proportionate to one's means, yet sacrificial (2 Cor. 8:12). Paul also noted that giving is to be voluntary: Each one must give as he has decided in his heart. Otherwise, that person's giving would be reluctant and offered under compulsion. Compulsion is the response to pressured extortion, which is what Paul wanted to avoid in the collection for the Jerusalem saints. God isn't interested in compulsion; instead, He loves a cheerful giver.

How is giving a source of cheer? How does a cheerful heart move you to meet the needs of others? What keeps you from giving with joy?

Day 3: Our generosity produces thanksgiving to God.

Read 2 Corinthians 9:8-11, considering the benefits of generosity.

To support his claim that God's people are meant to bless others through liberal giving, Paul cited Psalm 112:9. This psalm extols the traits of godly people whom the psalmist identified as "the man who fears the Lord," and "the righteous" (Ps. 112:1,6). The apostle quoted lines that describe the righteous person's history of generosity. He also included the next line from the psalm about God's eternal favor extending to such a person: "his righteousness endures forever" (Ps. 112:9). God will never forget His people's good works, including their generosity.

Paul stated that the Corinthians would be enriched in every way for their generosity. The benefits to be found through generosity are important, but not nearly as important as the validation of one's relationship with the Lord, proven to be genuine because of compassionate, cheerful giving (see 1 John 3:17).

How does a person's understanding of God impact his or her willingness to meet the needs of others?

Day 4: Others will glorify God through our generosity.

Read 2 Corinthians 9:12-13, noticing the outcome of generosity.

Ultimately, giving to others is intended to bring glory to God. Although the ministry of this service would supply the needs of the saints in Jerusalem, there was a greater outcome. Those who eventually received the generous gift would be overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. Their gratitude would extend beyond the Corinthians to God, the Provider and Sustainer of all. The generosity of the Corinthians would produce thanksgiving to God (v. 11).

Paul was confident that the saints in Jerusalem would glorify God for the Corinthians' generosity ... for them. Perhaps one reason Paul expected the saints in Jerusalem to glorify God for the Corinthians' gift was because he himself responded that way to the Philippians' generosity to him (see Phil. 4:20).

How can giving be an act of worship? How can giving be a means of honoring God?

Day 5: God's gift of His Son is the ultimate example.

Read 2 Corinthians 9:14-15, underlining verse 15.

As Paul concluded this section of his letter, he could not stop himself from glorifying God as he reflected on the gospel and its fruit among believers: Words are inadequate to explain the gift God has given us in His Son, Jesus Christ. Even so, God receives glory when His Son is worshiped. He deserves all we can ascribe to Him for His sacrifice on our behalf.

Consequently, all Christian giving is carried out in light of God's gift to us—an incredible, priceless, generous gift. God loved the world and gave us His Son (John 3:16). He “did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all” (Rom. 8:32). Indeed, it is through His Son that we are reconciled to God (see 2 Cor. 5:18). If God has demonstrated such profound generosity toward us, giving us an indescribable gift (even though we don't deserve it!), how can we not also give cheerfully and generously to others, especially those who belong to the household of faith (see Gal. 6:10)?

In what ways does God's generosity in the gift of His Son challenge you to meet the needs of others?



TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in 2 Corinthians 9, sharing with two other members of your Bible study group.

What truths has God brought to light for you this week in regards to your own generosity? Are there areas where you can be more generous? Consider that this may mean being generous with your time and talents in addition to your money.

How does your giving impact the needs of people both inside and outside the church? How does your giving impact yourself?

What challenges do you face when it comes to giving?
How are those challenges related to trust in God?



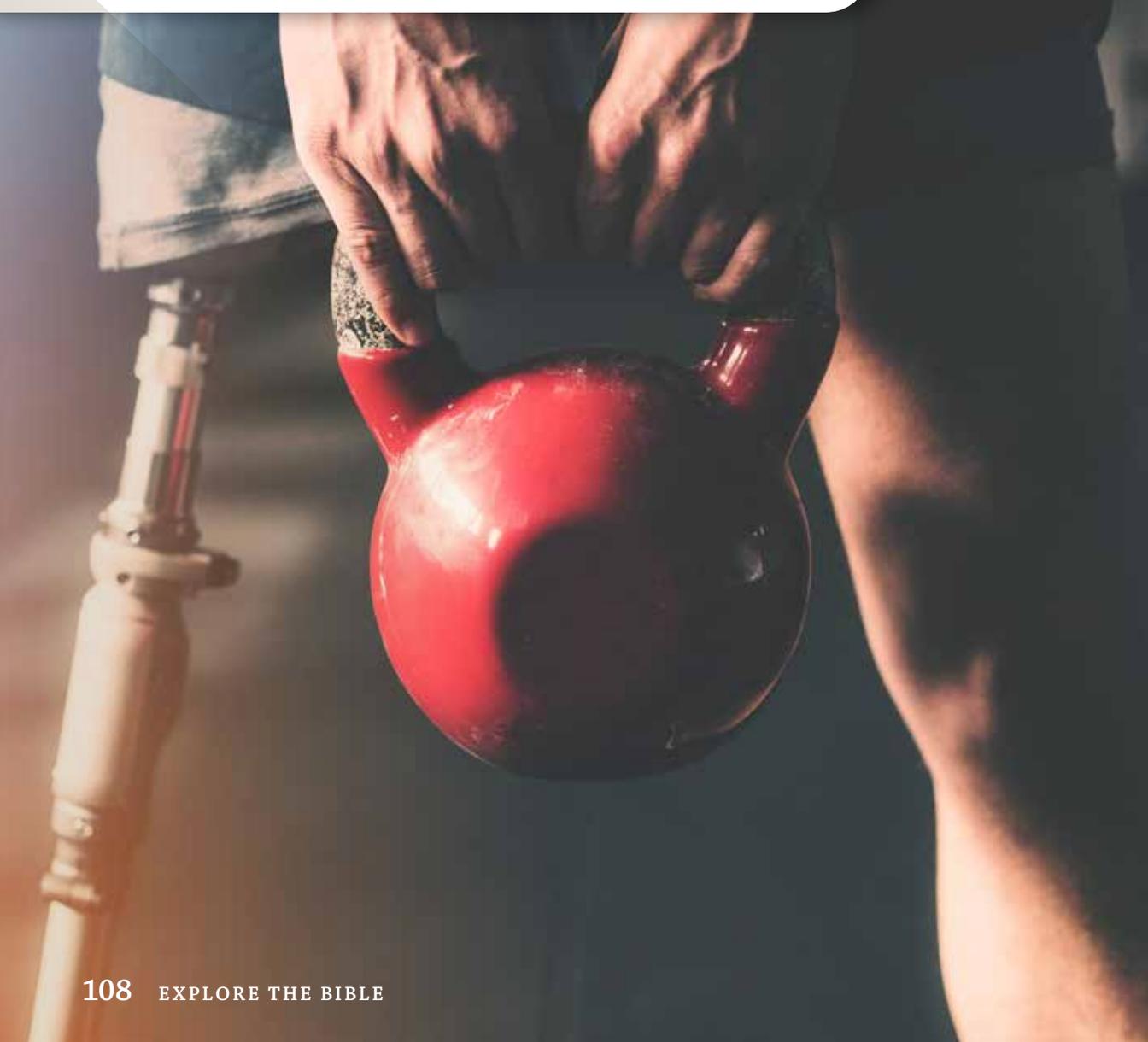
For additional context, read “A ‘Cheerful’ Giver,” an archived *Biblical Illustrator* article provided on the CD-ROM in the Spring 2018 *Explore the Bible: Leader Pack*.

Session 13

Finding Strength

Believers can trust in God's strength when confronted with their weaknesses.

2 Corinthians 12:7b-10; 13:2-8



What are some personal weaknesses or ongoing afflictions which which you find it difficult to live? What are some possible ways God might use those weaknesses for His purposes and His glory?

Many people have a weakness or on-going difficulty they consider an impediment or liability. They may pray for the removal of this perceived liabilities or seek other ways to overcome it. This week's study reminds us that God can use our weaknesses to anchor our faith, strengthen our witness, and magnify His grace and power.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Since the opening chapter of 2 Corinthians, Paul has bounced back and forth between the desire to commend himself again to the Corinthians (4:2; 6:4-10) and denying the need to commend himself based on his proven track record (3:1-3; 10:12-18). He concluded his letter by taking on the negative influence of the false apostles that had crept into the congregation.

Those false apostles had caused damage to Paul's reputation by casting doubt on his apostleship. Apparently, their claims must have amounted to something like, "he's not spiritual enough," or "there must be sin in his life," or "God is punishing and judging him as a fraud." They pointed to all the suffering, persecutions, problems, and affliction Paul had faced. Their insinuation was that if he was really a spokesperson for Christ he'd be protected from such suffering.

Paul rejected the need to compare himself to them (10:12). He certainly didn't think he was inferior to them in any way (12:11). Nevertheless, he sized up his résumé against theirs and magnified the grace and power of God manifested in his weakness (11:16-12:10). Suffering did not disqualify Paul but rather validated his credibility as a servant of Christ (12:19), established the foundation for offering sympathetic comfort (1:3-11), and provided an opportunity to glorify God (12:7-10).

The false apostles were preaching a false gospel. Paul was upset that the Corinthians readily gave them audience and put up with their teaching (11:3-4). In the end, when Paul visited them a third time (12:14; 13:1), he wanted to find them doing and believing what was right. If he found them otherwise, he would not be lenient but would deal harshly with them again that they might be built up into maturity (13:2-10).

2 CORINTHIANS 12:7b-10; 13:2-8

12:7b Therefore, so that I would not exalt myself, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to torment me so that I would not exalt myself. **8** Concerning this, **I pleaded with the LORD** **A** three times that it would leave me. **9** But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness.” Therefore, I will most gladly **boast** **B** all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may reside in me. **10** So I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and in difficulties, for the sake of Christ. **For when I am weak, then I am strong** **C**.

13:2 I gave a warning when I was present the second time, and now I give a **warning** **D** while I am absent to those who sinned before and to all the rest: If I come again, I will not be lenient, **3** since you seek **proof** **E** of Christ speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but powerful among you. **4** For he was crucified in weakness, but he lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by God’s power. **5** Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith. Examine yourselves. Or do you yourselves not recognize that Jesus Christ is in you? — unless you **fail the test** **F**. **6** And I hope you will recognize that we ourselves do not fail the test. **7** But we pray to God that you do nothing wrong — not that we may appear to pass the test, but that you may do what is right, even though we may appear to fail. **8** For we can’t do anything against the truth, but only for the truth.

Passage Outline

Paul’s Weakness
(2 Cor. 12:7b-10)

Christ’s Strength
(2 Cor. 13:2-4)

Our Choice
(2 Cor. 13:5-8)

Keywords

- a. God is approachable.
- b. God uses people who model humility and forsake pride (Prov. 16:18).
- c. God ways are different and exponentially stronger than humankind’s ways (Isa. 55:8).
- d. Immoral behavior existed in Corinth. Spiritual discipline was a notable conviction of Paul’s ministry. Sin must be dealt with, not ignored.
- e. Many Corinthians demanded proof of Christ’s activity, questioning Paul’s authority and genuineness. Discipline validated Paul’s authority in Christ.
- f. A lack of the Spirit’s activity is an indication that a person failed the test. The Spirit convicts, guides, and glorifies (John 16:8-14).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

In defending his credentials as an apostle, Paul insisted it was necessary to boast, but that he would boast about his weaknesses (2 Cor. 11:30). This led him to recall an experience when he was “caught up to the third heaven” and received “visions and revelations of the Lord” (12:1-2). Because of those extraordinary revelations, a thorn was given Paul in the flesh to keep him from becoming conceited. Lurking pride needs to be kept in check, so the Lord provided a specific measure in Paul’s life to corral self-exaltation.

Paul’s thorn in the flesh was a gift of God to magnify the grace of God. Instead of taking it away, the Lord allowed it to continue to teach Paul two important spiritual truths. First, God’s grace is sufficient. His grace is enough for anything and everything we encounter in this life. Second, God’s power is made perfect in weakness. Astoundingly, Paul said he not only boasted in weakness, but actually was content. His conclusion was, when I am weak, then I am strong in the strength Christ provides.

How does God use weaknesses and thorns to bring about His purposes and to shape believers’ lives? How do weaknesses cause believers to grow in their trust of God?

BIBLE SKILL: Memorize a verse and apply it to a real life situation. – Memorize 2 Corinthians 12:9 in your preferred Bible translation. Then write the verse in your own words. Finally, write a couple of sentences here or in a journal, stating how the verse can help you today make a tough decision or face a difficult situation.

The Corinthians wanted proof that Paul (the weak one) spoke for Christ? Paul was ready to show them! When they received punishment at Paul’s hand, perhaps by being handed “to Satan for the destruction of the flesh” (1 Cor. 5:5) they would in fact be undergoing the Lord’s discipline. God’s discipline—seen here through Paul’s correction of the Corinthians—demonstrated God’s power and love for his people, clarifying their relationship to Himself, and calling them to greater holiness as a people who bear His name and represent His gospel.

How is discipline an act of love? If God failed to discipline His followers, would He be viewed as weak or strong? Explain.

Paul exhorted the Corinthians to examine themselves to see whether they were in the faith. Hopefully, after examining themselves spiritually, they would recognize that Christ was in them. Unless, of course, they failed the test. Paul prayed that they make the right choice. The bottom line was this: Paul and his ministry among the Corinthians existed only for the truth. Perhaps the only appropriate response from the Corinthians was whether they would pursue and choose the same.

What is the difference between approaching others to convince them that you are right and approaching others so that they can be right?

APPLY THE TEXT

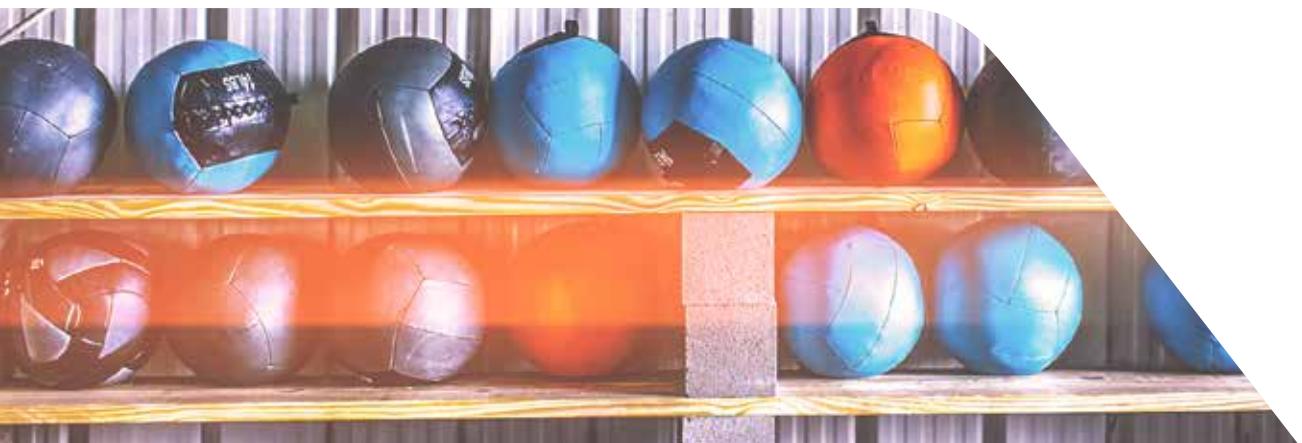
- Believers can find comfort and security in the grace God provides through His Son.
- Believers need to be aware that the power of the gospel is seen in God’s discipline of His people.
- All people must carefully examine their lives, looking for evidence of their salvation.

Share with the group ways God is using a “thorn” to shape and mold you for His honor. Record insights gained from others as they share. How can you learn from them?

What things is God using to shape you into a maturing follower of His? In what areas does He seem to be shaping you the most? Thank Him for working in your life, and commit afresh to allowing Him to shape you.

Examine your spiritual life looking for areas where you may have grown cold, or where obedience is a low priority. What actions do you need to take in light of your evaluation?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: God can use weaknesses to bring about His purposes.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7b-8, noting Paul's acknowledgment of the thorn.

Paul did not identify the thorn in the flesh. We are left to speculate. Bible scholars offer various ideas collected in three major categories: psychological or spiritual anxiety, opposition to his ministry, or some kind of physical condition of difficulty. Likely, it was something in the third category—a physical issue that created difficulties in his ministry of the gospel (see Gal. 4:13-15). It is likely the Corinthians were familiar with the nature of Paul's thorn.

Paul referred to the thorn as a messenger of Satan to harass him. He wasn't saying that the issue originated with Satan, since it was given to Paul to crush self-exaltation (which the devil would support). Instead, the thorn was simultaneously given by God but used by Satan; a gift from one used as a tool by the other.

Paul's thorn drove him to plead with the Lord three times that it would leave. But the Lord chose to keep it in Paul's life to provide a deeper spiritual application and purpose.

How has God used weaknesses and thorns in your life to bring about His purposes?

Day 2: Believers are responsible for their sins.

Read 2 Corinthians 13:2, identifying Paul's warning.

Paul was concerned that things would not be as he expected on his next trip to Corinth. He was concerned that he might have to "grieve for many who sinned before and have not repented of the moral impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality they practiced" (2 Cor. 12:21). He had already given warning when he was with them, and now gave a warning while he was absent.

Some may think Paul was bullying them with his authority, but this was not the case. He was trying to build them up (2 Cor. 10:8-9). If he needed to deal harshly with them on account of their sins, it would be in keeping with his authority as an apostle. Some in the Corinthian church thought Paul was weak in person (2 Cor. 10:10). If things did not change, Paul did not plan to be lenient this time toward those who had not followed through with his prior warnings.

What role should the church and church leaders play in holding you accountable for spiritual growth? What is your responsibility when challenged to grow spiritually?

Day 3: God's discipline is a sign of His strength.

Read 2 Corinthians 13:3-4, paying close attention to verse 4.

The Corinthians wanted proof that Christ was speaking in and through Paul. Paul was insistent that he was a genuine messenger of the Lord. In the actions that he would undertake in disciplining them, they would see the proof they were looking for. Paul said, Jesus is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. How so? Through Paul's gospel ministry and authority. That's why Paul's warnings seem so punitive in these verses.

Jesus was crucified in weakness, which is why Paul boasted in the cross. In humbling Himself by taking on humanity, Jesus submitted to the most horrible of deaths. Yet no one took Jesus' life from Him, He laid it down by His own choice. Jesus now and forever lives by the power of God, which is why the resurrection is central to the Christian faith and proclamation. So Paul declared to the Corinthians that he was on Christ's side after all.

If God failed to discipline you, would you view Him as weak or strong? Explain.

Day 4: Believers should test their faith.

Read 2 Corinthians 13:5-6, considering what a test of faith might be.

If they had trusted Christ, it would be evident in their lives and in their obedience to God's messenger seeking to bring them to maturity in the gospel.

Hopefully, after examining themselves spiritually, they would recognize that Christ was in them. Unless, of course, they failed the test. The Corinthians wanted proof about Paul, and now he turned their demand back on them to supply proof of their own spiritual status. Test yourselves, Paul said. He trusted that their response would be affirmative as those who were new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

Paul was confident that he passed the test and hoped the Corinthians would recognize that he indeed did pass the test. He wanted them to perceive the truth that Christ was in Paul, regardless of what the false apostles said to the contrary. If Paul failed the test, then everything he had written to them was invalid, or at least, deceptive. But he passed, as one who had Christ in him. He told the Galatians, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

How can you test your faith? Why might it be important for you to do so?

Day 5: God's truth is the standard.

Read 2 Corinthians 13:7-8, noting the importance of the truth.

It's not about whether Paul appeared to pass the test or whether he appeared to fail. What was important was whether or not the Corinthians themselves demonstrated Christ in them, proving that they passed the test. The Corinthians' passing the test did reflect on Paul's ministry among them, however. Their authenticity in the faith was one of the strongest commendations of Paul's apostolic fruitfulness (2 Cor. 3:1-3).

As God's messenger and ambassador for Christ, Paul sought only the truth. He could not do anything against the truth of Jesus Christ and His gospel. Paul declared earlier, "the truth of Christ is in me" (2 Cor. 11:10), and his ministry among them was an open display of the truth.

What is the difference between approaching others to convince them that you are right and approaching others so they can be right? How is the way in which you approach another person a test of faith and maturity for you?

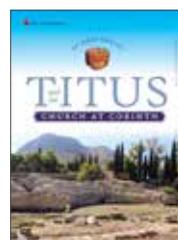
TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in 2 Corinthians 12 and 13, sharing with two other members of your Bible study group.

How can you develop trust in God's strength during times of weakness? What weaknesses in your own life do you need to be aware of?

What does your response to discipline reveal about your view of God?

What scares you the most about examining your life and faith?
How can others help you move past those fears?



For additional context, read "Titus and the Church at Corinth" and "Righteousness' in Paul's Writings" in the Spring 2018 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

LEADER HELPS

Using the Daily Discipleship Guide to Lead a Bible Study Group

The *Daily Discipleship Guide* was created for the purpose of building disciples. As the leader of the group, you play a major role. You can build disciples through the group Bible study time, encouraging daily Bible engagement, facilitating smaller groups, and apprenticing future leaders.

Building Disciples through the Group Time

Leading the group Bible study time is the most direct way you will build disciples. Each week, you will introduce the group to the Bible passage, examine the key message in that passage, and challenge the group to act on that passage. Doing so requires preparation. Here is a way to prepare that gives you adequate time to study the lesson and will make the session fresh in your own life.

Early in the Week (Sunday or Monday)

- Ask God to open your mind and heart to His Word as you study.
- Study the Bible passage.
 - Read the passage in your Bible, listing key words, phrases, places, and people.
 - Review the first five pages of the *Daily Discipleship Guide* for that session and the commentary provided in the Leader Helps for that session. On your list, add information discovered about the words, phrases, places, and people listed.
 - Consult the *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* for additional insight.
 - Consult *Biblical Illustrator* for articles that give biblical backgrounds to the passage.
- Pay careful attention to the Apply the Text section for that session, looking for ways you need to apply the Bible in your own life.



Through the Week

- Ask God to direct your creation of the group plan.
- Create a group plan.
 - Review the group plan in the back of the *Daily Discipleship Guide*.
 - Adjust the plan to fit the needs of your group.
 - Consult *QuickSource* for additional ideas.
 - Review the weekly Adult Extra idea on the Explore the Bible blog (Blog. LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible/Adults/LeaderExtras).
 - Note: You can create custom plans using the DOC file provided on the CD-ROM included in the *Leader Pack*—it's the same content printed in the Leader Helps.
- Complete the Daily Exploration activities in the days leading up to the group time.
- Meet with a group of three to four other teachers to share and pray for each other. Use Talk It Out to start your conversation.
- Start gathering items you plan to use in the group time.
- Pull needed posters from the *Explore the Bible: Leader Pack* (or create your own using Visual Ideas on pages 160–161).

The Day before Group Study Time

- Pray for specific group members and their needs.
- Review your group plan, making any additional adjustments.
- Make sure you have all your resources gathered.

The Day of the Group Study Time

- Arrive early.
- Pray for the study and the group members.
- Lead the study, adjusting as you go.

Continued on next page

After the Group Study Time

- Consider the After the Session idea at the end of the group plans.
- Contact all group members, encouraging them to complete the Daily Exploration section and sharing gathered prayer requests and other appropriate information.
- Record insights gained about teaching, group members, and Scripture.
- Do it all again.

Building Disciples by Encouraging Daily Bible Engagement

As teachers, we have taken on the responsibility of encouraging everyone on our ministry list (class roll, membership list, etc.) to engage daily in Bible study. We can't make them do it, but we can provide them with a tool and encourage them to use it.

Here are some ways to encourage your group to engage with the Bible daily.

- **Ask them.** That seems simple, but the simple is not always easy. Learn to comfortably ask if group members are studying the Bible. You may want to use a statement instead of a question, such as, "I hope you took a look at the Day 3 activity for this week." It's a question disguised as a statement, so it's not as threatening.
- **Tell them.** Let them know that you are using the Daily Exploration section as well. Set the standard.
- **Show them.** Point to the Daily Exploration section at the conclusion of the group study. From time to time, demonstrate how to use the section, guiding them through Day 1 as a group.
- **Invite them.** Call on pre-enlisted volunteers to share with the group what they are learning and how they are using the Daily Exploration section.

Building Disciples through Smaller Groups

Peter became the spokesman for the early church, preaching a sermon that registered three thousand decisions in one day. John, the youngest disciple, would live the longest of the Twelve and would be used to write a Gospel and to give us a glimpse into eternity through the Book of Revelation. James, John's older brother, was the first of the Twelve to be a martyr. These three men were the three people that Jesus seemed to invest in the most. They were the three taken up to the mountain to see His transfiguration. They were the three called on to go further into the garden as He prayed awaiting His betrayal. The lives and deaths of Peter, James, and John remind us of the importance of smaller groups of three to four meeting to hold each other accountable for spiritual growth.

At the end of every session, you will find a section entitled Talk It Out. This section is designed for smaller groups of three to four people to meet weekly. The goal of the smaller groups is simple: holding ourselves and others accountable for living a Christ-honoring life.

Create smaller groups:

- Explain the importance of the smaller groups, emphasizing the goal.
- Allow group members to form their own initial groups of three by gender (men's smaller groups and women's smaller groups). This tends to work better than assigning groups.
- Allow groups to add one person from the names on the ministry list of people who are not present.
- You may want to encourage the groups to form based on neighborhoods or proximity to work.
- Make sure some of the groups have extra space for new group members and guests.
- As the Bible study group grows, you may need to reorganize the smaller groups, but try not to regroup too often so that trust can be built within each smaller group.

Support the smaller groups:

- Provide opportunities for the members of the smaller groups to pray with each other during the group time.
- Make study assignments in the weekly group time based on the smaller groups.
- Pre-enlist a volunteer to share with the larger group how participation in the smaller group is impacting his or her life.
- Periodically organize fellowship events built around the smaller groups. The smaller groups could be the basis for teams during the event.

Be in a smaller group:

- Meet with two or three other Bible study leaders as part of your weekly preparation.
- Be part of a smaller group within your class.
- Host a smaller group for guests and new group members.

Continued on next page

Building Disciples by Apprenticing Other Leaders

Starting new groups is critical to the life of your church and the lives of the individuals in your group. There are people in your group who need to be challenged to take on a greater role in your church. Providing the opportunity to do so helps them grow and removes the largest barrier to starting new Bible study groups—finding a leader for a new group. You can make a difference in the growth of individual group members and in the future growth of your church by apprenticing potential group leaders. Here's how you can use the *Daily Discipleship Guide* to make this happen.

- **Step 1:** Ask a group member to follow along in the Leader Helps for that session as you lead the group. Tell him or her to note what you did and what you adjusted. You are not providing a different book; you're just encouraging your apprentice to use the book he or she has in a different way. Ask this person to do this before arriving for the weekly group time.
- **Step 2:** After that group experience, spend time with the group member going over what you did and how you adjusted the leader material for the group.
- **Step 3:** Invite him or her to do this again in a few weeks.
- **Step 4:** Ask him or her to lead a group time or part of one using the suggestions in the Leader Helps for that session. You may be away that week, or you can simply observe as a group member. Offer to help him or her prepare if needed.
- **Step 5:** As your apprentice gains confidence, allow him or her to teach more in the near future.
- **Step 6:** As a need for a new group surfaces, prepare to move on to lead the new group, with the apprentice becoming the leader of the current group (which tends to work best), or commission the apprentice and a few others from the group to start a new group. Either way, the apprentice will be using the book he or she already uses, just in a different way.
- **Step 7:** Do it all again.

Not everyone in the group will become a Bible study leader. For those who do, you can become a mentor to potential leaders, extending your teaching ministry and demonstrating discipleship.

UNITED IN CHRIST

1 Corinthians 1:10-25

FOCUS ATTENTION

DO: Prior to the group's arrival, list names of clubs and organizations on a whiteboard (examples: philanthropic, civic, school, and sports organizations). As the group arrives, invite individuals to review the list and add additional organizations. Lead the group to name the purpose of each organization, using electronic devices for research as necessary.

ASK: *Have you been part of a club or organization that was driven by its purpose? How did that purpose help them deal with differences within the group?* (p. 13)

TRANSITION: Note that church is a group of people from many different walks of life, backgrounds, interests, and more that find their unity in the gospel, in the person and work of Jesus Christ. *Say: Sometimes we let our preferences get in the way of our love and mission, and believers are unnecessarily divided. In this week's lesson, Paul addressed divisions in the church at Corinth and called believers back to unity.*

INTRODUCE: Direct attention to the new study of 1 and 2 Corinthians by locating Corinth on **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Paul's Second Missionary Journey*) or on the map inside the back cover. Then review **Pack Item 2** (*Outline: 1, 2 Corinthians*; also on p. 9) briefly highlighting the major points, as indicated by Roman numerals.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud 1 Corinthians 1:10, as the rest of the group listens for the way Paul addressed the Corinthians.

- **(1:10)** The verb translated appeal indicates Paul's intense concern for the issue of unity. The use of brothers was the apostle's reminder that believers belong to the same spiritual family. Paul's use of Jesus' full name reminds us of the seriousness of his appeal. The names of Paul, Apollos, and Cephas pale into insignificance when compared with the name and authority of Christ.

EMPHASIZE: Point out that Paul was beginning a discussion about squabbles within the family of God in Corinth. Direct attention to **Pack Item 4** (*Poster: Problems in Corinth*) and distribute copies of **Pack Item 12** (*Handout: Problems in Corinth*). Review the list, explaining that these issues will be addressed by Paul throughout the Books of 1 and 2 Corinthians.

STUDY: Lead the group to locate three specific ways Paul called the church to unity. Emphasize that Paul was focusing on basic doctrinal convictions and goals as opposed to unity of opinion about everything.

DISCUSS: *What factors could potentially threaten unity in a church? What steps might be taken to ensure that a local church remains unified?* (p. 15)

READ: Direct the group to listen for divisions in the church based on personalities (religious leaders) as you read aloud 1 Corinthians 1:11-16.

- **(1:11)** We are at a loss to understand the identity of either Chloe or the members of her household. Was she a wealthy Corinthian Christian woman who had sent some of her employees to Ephesus on business? If so, had they sought out Paul at her request to give him an update on the church? Could these perhaps have been her children? The original language is vague, literally “the ones of Chloe.” In any case, the Corinthians knew the context and it is not necessary that we know more details about Chloe.
- **(1:12)** Paul was the preacher who had first preached the gospel to Corinth. Naturally, some of the Christians in Corinth, especially those who had become believers during Paul’s long ministry there, were loyal to him. Apollos had succeeded Paul as the spiritual leader of the Corinthian congregation (Acts 18:24–19:1). Some of the Corinthians thought Apollos was a better teacher or preacher than Paul, so they had become enthusiastic followers of “the new guy.” Cephas was Simon Peter. There is no record Peter ever visited Corinth, but some Corinthians became fans of his perhaps because he had followed Jesus from the beginning and Jesus had given him a special blessing (Matt. 16:19). Those who claimed to follow Christ may have felt superior to the other three parties and had become their own high-and-mighty group. Boasting in Christ is a good thing; boasting about oneself for following Christ is sinful.
- **(1:16)** Who took over the baptizing responsibilities after Paul had baptized the first converts? He did not say. The Corinthians would have remembered. In any case, Paul was pleased that his decision demonstrated he had no intention for anybody to claim that they had been baptized in his name.

DISCUSS: *Where do you see this kind of division in the church today? How does rivalry get in the way of God’s work?* (p. 15)

TRANSITION: *Even though these leaders helped the church in Corinth to grow, Paul’s contempt for this rivalry and division is clear in these verses. Basing allegiances on human personalities leads to prideful boasting and divisions within the church.*

CLARIFY: Lead the group to locate Paul’s rhetorical questions in verse 13 (p. 14). Emphasize that Paul used this line of questioning to illustrate that no one but Christ is sufficient for salvation.

DISCUSS: *Paul showed contempt for people claiming to belong to him but later urged the church in Corinth to imitate him (4:16). What is the difference? How can you balance a healthy appreciation for a pastor, leader, or teacher who has greatly impacted your spiritual life with a careful protection against disunity between other believers (maybe other church members) who don’t share the same experience?*

READ: Direct the group to read silently 1 Corinthians 1:17-25, looking for references to the cross of Christ.

- **(1:17)** Paul's commission, which he had received from Christ at the time of his conversion (Acts 26:16-18), was to preach the gospel. He was persuaded that eloquence or elaborate rhetoric or anything that smacked of manipulation was to be avoided. It is the cross of Christ, simply presented, that must be central. (See also 1 Cor. 2:1-5.) Clever words (style) detract from the substance of the message preached.
- **(1:18-19)** He knew that the simple message of the cross is often rejected as folly by those who depend on human cleverness to discern truth. Those who reject the cross are already perishing, on their way to eternal separation from God. Yet those who receive the good news—convicted of its truth by the Spirit of God—are being saved. They have begun the spiritual transformation that happens by God's power rather than by human wisdom.

SAY: *For Paul, the cross (v. 18) was a rallying point and unifier for the church. But the cross also divides: it divides those who are perishing from those who are being saved.*

DO: Distribute **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark*) for the group to use as a tool for tracking verses memorized throughout the study. Direct attention to 1 Corinthians 1:23, the memory verse for the week. Invite group to complete the first part of the Bible Skill activity (p. 15) by writing the verse in their own words in the margin.

ILLUSTRATE: Draw a line on the whiteboard. On one side write "Saved" and on the other side write "Not Saved." Say: *The only dividing line believers should recognize is the division between those who are saved and those who are not.*

DISCUSS: *How is the cross of Christ divisive in our world today?* (p. 15)

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

REVIEW: Lead the group to review the summary statements under Apply The Text (p. 17). Invite individuals to pick the statement that best describes their biggest insight gained during the session.

RESPOND: Call attention to the third question set under Apply The Text (PSG, p. 17): *What walls have you built between yourself and other people? Which of those walls get in the way of your building relationships with other believers? What actions do you need to take to begin to remove these walls? Lead group to identify one action they can take to begin to remove these walls.*

PRAY: Thank God for the unity of believers, based on sharing the same salvation through their confession of Christ. Pray that your church would be united in Christ.

AFTER THE SESSION

Pray for your group and your church, especially for situations in which unity needs to be restored.

GLORIFYING GOD

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

FOCUS ATTENTION

LIST: As the group arrives, direct them to identify ways people's lifestyles affect their bodies, both positive and negative. You may want to recruit a volunteer to keep a list of the comments. After most have arrived, review some of the things identified.

DISCUSS: *To what degree do you think it matters how a person uses his or her body? How would you describe the connection between one's body and one's spiritual life?* (p. 21)

EXPLAIN: *In today's study, we will discover how Paul helped immature believers at Corinth come to a better understanding of how believers honor God through holy living.* Direct attention to **Pack Item 5** (*Map: Reconstruction of Corinth*) to identify the location of the temples, pointing out some of the idols worshiped in Corinth. Point out how integrated idol worship was in the city and how those ingrained cultural beliefs could have impacted the new Christians.

CLARIFY: Use the display of **Pack Item 2** (*Outline: 1,2 Corinthians*; also on p. 9) and copies of **Pack Item 7** (*Handout: Corinthians Time Line*) to help the group gain an understanding of where the passage for today fits into the context of Paul's letters to the Corinthians.

TRANSITION: *Some people embrace the notion that what they do with their own body is their business. The first-century Christians thought similarly. They came out of lifestyles of physical indulgence and supposed that once they were followers of Jesus, everything bodily was still permitted.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: As you read 1 Corinthians 6:12-14, direct the group to follow the Scripture (p. 22) and circle the first part of verse 12.

- **(6:12)** We are not the first society to quote popular slogans to express the way we live. In the city of Corinth, a common slogan was, "All things are lawful for me." Paul quoted the saying back to the Corinthians four times in the letter, twice in this verse and twice in 10:23. Apparently it was used to express much the same thing that we mean by "do your own thing."
- **(6:14)** Although we do not know precisely what life in a resurrection body will be like, we can be sure that it goes well beyond the natural, biological order of human life as we experience it now. When we understand Christ's lordship over all aspects of life, including our very body, we will live differently than those who chant mottoes such as, "Everything is permissible for me."

EXPLAIN: *Paul possibly quoted something he had said previously or slogans from the broader Corinthian culture. The verses fall within Paul's larger discussion of Christian liberty and freedom in 1 Corinthians 5–11. Either way, the Corinthian believers misapplied the quoted phrases, using them to pursue ungodly actions and selfish ends.*

DISCOVER: Invite volunteers to read aloud John 8:36 and Galatians 5:1 as the group listens for references to freedom. Stress that freedom in Christ is never meant as a license to sin freely.

ASK: *What is the relationship between freedom and responsibility? What might be said to the person who holds the idea that they are free to do as they please? (p. 23)*

TRANSITION: *Paul stressed that believers can live holy lives by focusing on Christ's Lordship and not being controlled by temporal things, such as food and sexual appetites.*

READ: Direct the group to silently read 1 Corinthians 6:15-17, envisioning the inflections Paul would have used if he had said the words aloud.

- **(6:15)** Here he emphasized that our being united with Christ involves our whole person, that is, it includes your bodies, and is not just some kind of spiritual union. Our physical selves and our spiritual selves—call this our “souls” or our “spirits,” if you will—are inseparably intertwined in this life.
- **(6:16-17)** The one-flesh bond between husband and wife was ordained by God from the beginning. Christians are to recognize, however, that as wonderful as this union is, there is another union that is even greater. That is the union between the believer and the Lord. Paul was returning to the thought of verse 15 (“your bodies are the members of Christ”) and yet transcending it.

DO: Lead the group to identify words or phrases that contrast sacred unity with the perverted union of sexual promiscuity. Highlight words or phrases that reinforce the truth that believers are a part of Christ's body, the church. Note that as members of the church, there is accountability with one another for how we behave.

DISCUSS: *Why might a person bristle at the thought of accountability with another person? How does being held accountable by others help a person use his or her freedom for good?*

DISCUSS: *How should being united with Christ impact how a person views what he or she does with his or her body?*

READ: As you read aloud 1 Corinthians 6:18-20, encourage the group to listen for the connection between believers' bodies and the Holy Spirit.

- **(6:18)** Paul's analysis of the horror of sexual sin is not open to misinterpretation. Sexual sin is an offense against God and the person one has been intimate with; moreover, it is a crime against one's very body. No doubt Paul meant to create a sense of shame for those Corinthian Christians who had sinned in this way.

- **(6:19-20)** Paul wrote that the body of the individual Christian serves as a “house for God” because of the Holy Spirit within you. Because the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in each believer personally (Rom. 8:9), the very body of the believer has been made holy, set apart by the Holy Spirit. If a believer indulges in immorality, that sinful behavior contradicts what God has said is true of the believer’s body. The indwelling Spirit is a gift from God Himself. It is a dangerous thing for believers to dishonor God’s gift to them—His own Spirit—by indulging in sexual misbehavior.
- **(6:19-20)** Paul began this paragraph with a warning: run away from sexual immorality. He ended with an astonishing command: So glorify God in your body. Far from our bodies still being the instruments of sin, we are now able to bring praise to Him by using our bodies in ways that compel others to observe that we are united to Christ.

EXPLAIN: *Paul reminded the Corinthian believers that they were sanctuaries for the Holy Spirit. Because of the price paid by Christ to secure their salvation, they should have sought to honor Him with how they used their bodies.*

GUIDE: Direct a volunteer to read aloud 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8. Then ask: *How does what Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 compare to what he wrote to the Corinthian believers?* (p. 23)

REFLECT: Lead the group to reflect on what it means to be bought at a price (v. 20) and record insights in the margin.

DISCUSS: *How does realizing you were bought at a price encourage you to honor God with how you use your body?*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

REVIEW: Read the statements under Apply The Text (p. 24). Invite volunteers to examine their focus in life and consider silently: *Are you more focused on Christ or temporal things? What evidence would you point to in order to support your answer? What needs to change and how?*

DISCUSS: Call attention to the second question set under Apply The Text on page 24. *(Discuss as a group ways of holding each other accountable for using your body to honor God. How can the group hold each other accountable without judging, condoning, or ignoring?)* Encourage the group to consider forming accountability partnerships, or pairs of believers who will help each other be mutually accountable for honoring God with their bodies.

PRAY: Lead the group in prayer, requesting God’s strength as you honor Him through holy living in an unholy world.

AFTER THE SESSION

Contact the group with a reminder of the discussion about accountability. Encourage them to hold each other accountable without judging, condoning, or ignoring. Include the memory verse for this week (1 Cor. 6:14).

KEEPING COMMITMENTS

1 Corinthians 7:17

FOCUS ATTENTION

GUIDE: As the group arrives, hand each person a small sheet of paper. Be sure everyone has a pen or pencil. Lead the group to write on the paper brief advice related to marriage. Collect the papers and read aloud responses.

SAY: *Sometimes bridal showers feature activities such as we just completed, where attendees provide guidance for the soon-to-be married couple. Relationship guidance abounds, and it can be difficult to sort valid from invalid counsel. Today's session provides Scriptural basis for how believers can honor God by keeping their vows related to marriage and purity.*

EXPLAIN: Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 7 as a response to questions from the Corinthians related to marriage after conversion. The chapter is only a beginning point for the discussion on marriage, not a complete statement about marriage or its ethical implications.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Form two listening teams. As you read aloud 1 Corinthians 7:1-7, instruct one team to listen for Paul's counsel to husbands. Direct the second team to listen for Paul's counsel to wives.

- **(7:1)** The citizens of Corinth typically connected sexual relations to pagan worship practices. As we saw in last week's lesson, some of the new believers had no problem with continuing the sexual immorality of their previous lives.
- **(7:4)** Here, Paul expanded on this idea but in the context of Christian marriage. The physical body of the husband belongs to the wife and the body of the wife belongs to the husband. Paul was clearly talking about sexual fulfillment. Neither partner in the marriage has the right to fulfill only his or her own desires. Rather, both the husband and the wife are to strive to please the other.
- **(7:4)** Sadly, the words of this verse have been used to justify abuse by husbands. The principle of sacrificial love within marriage (see Eph. 5:25-30) means that there are limits to Paul's teaching. Note that Paul gave the wife the same authority over her husband's body that the husband has over her's.
- **(7:5)** For a Christian couple there may be times when spiritual considerations lead to a pause in marital intimacy. Paul was clear that this was to be by mutual consent, and only temporarily. The spiritual reason he noted was so that the couple might devote themselves to prayer.

CHART: On a whiteboard or large sheet of paper, create a chart with the headings "Husbands," "Wives," "Unmarried and Widows," and "Marriage and Divorce." Invite the group to call out Paul's counsel for husbands and wives in this passage; list points under the respective headings.

CLARIFY: Point out that sexual relations in Corinth were strongly tied to pagan worship. Direct attention to **Pack Item 11** (*Handout: Key Idols in Corinth*). Review the information under Aphrodite to further explain the sexual climate of Corinth.

DISCOVER: Form two discussion teams. Assign questions (p. 31) as follows to each group. Group 1: *How does Paul's teaching of "duty" and "rights" in marriage contrast with contemporary views about marital relationships?* Group 2: *What corrections need to be made for a healthy view of sex within marriage? What are some implications to be avoided?* After allowing each team time to work, call for a volunteer from each to share. Clarify as needed using information from this leader guide.

TRANSITION: *Paul next turned his focus to the unmarried and the widows. He commended celibacy to the Corinthian believers, pointing to his own marital status. Paul was most likely a widower, to account for his being a Pharisee.*

READ: Ask a volunteer to read 1 Corinthians 7:8-9. Invite volunteers with different translations (accessed on electronic devices if necessary) to read the passage as well. Lead the group to identify the differences in each translation and how combining of the differences gives a clearer view to the passage.

- **(7:8)** In the beginning, God had declared, "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18), and so He brought our first parents together in marriage. In other words, marriage is good. But we should not therefore reach the conclusion that staying single is bad. Paul balanced the statement from Genesis with the idea that it is good for them (single persons) to remain single. The apostle at this point did not give the reasons for staying single. In 7:32-33,40, however, he taught that those who are single can be more devoted to the Lord's work.
- **(7:8)** Paul referred to his own single status again (as I am). Nothing is known about the apostle's marital history. He had likely been married because he was a Jewish rabbi. It is possible that Paul had been married but that his wife had died. It is certain that Paul was single (and celibate) during his missionary travels (9:5-6).

CHART: Invite volunteers to summarize Paul's counsel to the unmarried and widows, and record brief information on the chart. Note that Paul affirmed marriage for those who were not given the gift of celibacy on practical terms related to temptation.

DISCUSS: *Assess your agreement with the following: "Believers are to be content regardless of marital status." How does this statement summarize Paul's point? What is the relationship between what Paul was teaching and God's expectation of His people living in a God-honoring way?*

READ: Invite a volunteer to read 1 Corinthians 7:10-13, while the group listens for Paul's specific instruction about marriage and divorce.

- **(7:11)** The apostle knew that sometimes divorce happens for a Christian couple without legitimate reasons. Paul believed there were two options for such divorced believers: They were to remain unmarried or be reconciled to the former spouse. Paul did not offer further guidelines, such as cases in which reconciliation is rejected. Further, the apostle did not address the matter of spousal mistreatment or even abuse. He was focusing on the specific situation of a Christian couple in which one had left the marriage without an acceptable reason.
- **(7:12)** In a “mixed marriage,” what is most desirable is for the marriage to remain intact. Paul gave the example of a man who had come to faith in Christ but who had a wife who is an unbeliever. The believing husband must not leave the marriage. As difficult as such a marriage might be, if at all possible it should be preserved.

CHART: Lead group to summarize Paul’s instructions about marriage and divorce and record responses on chart.

CLARIFY: Be careful to affirm marriage between a man and a woman without condoning mistreatment or tolerating an abuse. Focus on the specific situation being addressed by Paul, when one spouse becomes a believer and the other spouse wants a divorce as a result.

DISCUSS: *How does this passage help us relate to people who were friends prior to our accepting Christ? What does this passage teach us about the mutual commitment of a marriage?* (p. 31)

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

REVIEW: Look over the chart created during the session. Call attention to the statements under Apply The Text (p. 32). Lead the group to connect the information on the chart with the statements.

RESPOND: Call attention to the first question set under Apply The Text (p. 32): *Regardless of your marital status, what are you doing to make sure your sexual expression honors God and His design for creation? How can you help others understand God’s expectations?* Lead the group to prayerfully consider their responses.

MEMORIZE: Invite a volunteer to read aloud 1 Corinthians 7:17, the memory verse for this week. Encourage the group to memorize the verse as a summary of how believers should honor God by keeping their vows related to marriage and purity. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark*) as needed.

PRAY: Thank God for the opportunity to live in relationship with each other. Ask Him to help each person apply Paul’s guidance to his or her specific situation so that God will be honored.

AFTER THE SESSION

Pray that the session content will speak clearly to married and singles about honoring God by keeping their vows related to marriage and purity.

INFLUENCING FOR CHRIST

1 Corinthians 9:19-27; 10:31-33; 11:1

FOCUS ATTENTION

GUIDE: As the group arrives, point to the following names that you've written on a board: Christopher Columbus, Abraham Lincoln, Henry Ford, Sigmund Freud, The Beatles, and Steve Jobs. Begin the session by inviting volunteers to guess what the names have in common. Point out that they all appear in in the book *TIME: The 100 Most Influential People of All Time*. Ask: *Who would you add to the list? Why?*

STATE: *Each day we encounter people who are trying to influence us, and every person we encounter may be influenced by us as well. Ask: What living person has had the most positive influence in your life? Who have you had the most influence on, for better or for worse? (p. 37)*

TRANSITION: Remind the group that Paul's letter to the Corinthians was intended to address matters the believers asked about in a letter to him. Distribute copies, as needed, of **Pack Item 12** (*Handout: Problems in Corinth*). Use the handout and **Pack Item 4** (*Poster: Problems in Corinth*) to briefly review the major issues Paul had already tackled. State that he would now focus on another question posed to him by the Corinthian church: Is it appropriate to eat food sacrificed to idols?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Direct a volunteer to read aloud 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, asking the rest to listen for Paul's references to freedom.

- **(9:19)** He followed cultural practices (in areas where there are no biblical prohibitions) if that would help people come to faith in Christ. He began by asserting his personal situation as a free man. He was speaking literally of his status as a Roman citizen (Acts 22:25-28). Thus, he did not have to conform to the expectations of others. This, of course, contrasted with the situation of those who lived in slavery. They did not have such freedom. Spiritually and figuratively, Paul was Christ's slave (see Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:1). Here, however, he was thinking of his voluntary—and therefore figurative—slavery to everyone. He was willing to conform to the cultural expectations even of unbelievers. This was not because Paul was wishy-washy or because he wanted to blend into his surroundings like a chameleon. Rather, he lived this way to win more of them to Christ
- **(9:21)** The primary ethnic divide for the first Christians was between Jew and Gentile. Gentiles by definition were those without the law of Moses. Paul made it clear that when he lived as if he were a Gentile, he lived within Christ's law, that is, according to the teachings of Jesus.

- **(9:22)** Paul wanted to win the weak who were actually already connected to the congregation. He did not want them to fall into a sinful pattern of life. He wanted the faith of weak believers to be strengthened.

EXPLAIN: Point out that some among the Galatians and Corinthians were using their freedom in Christ as an opportunity to please others, rather than serving others in love.

SEARCH: Lead everyone to search 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 for the various groups identified as part of Paul's missionary strategy, beginning with the Jews. Invite volunteers to share insight.

DISCUSS: Explain that Paul was not making cultural concessions to compromise the gospel. Ask: *How can a believer contextualize the gospel without compromising the gospel? What principles can be found in this passage for establishing a proper line?* (p. 39)

READ: Direct the group to read silently 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, locating comparisons to running. Point out that Paul's use of runners in a stadium would have been readily understood to his readers, since Corinth hosted the Isthmian Games, which were similar to the Olympic Games in Greece.

- **(9:26)** Paul transitioned to apply the athletic image directly to himself. In a foot race, no one can win who runs aimlessly. Every stride must be purposeful (see also Phil. 3:13-14). Paul switched his analogy to a different sporting event, from running to boxing. In the ring the boxer must make every punch count. Paul made everything in his life count. He did not box like one beating the air. His "spiritual punches" were meant to land in order to have the desired effect.
- **(9:27)** Just as athletes train in ways that make them sore and uncomfortable in order to attain their goal, so Paul endured physical hardship for the sake of advancing the gospel (2 Cor. 6:3-10). The term used for disqualified means "not approved" or "not passing the test." He was talking about the possibility of being disqualified from receiving the reward, rather than losing his salvation. (See 1 Cor. 3:10-15 for another discussion of gaining or losing rewards, in which he concluded: "If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved.")

AFFIRM: Note that Paul compared the Christian life to running in a race, pointing out that discipline is required if one does not want to be disqualified. Affirm salvation as being secure for believers.

STUDY: Call attention to the Bible Skill (p. 39). Invite volunteers to read each of the passages referenced. Ask: *How can you relate these passages to 1 Corinthians 9:24-27?*

GUIDE: Discuss the concept of discipline in relationship to the Christian life. Invite volunteers to locate references to discipline in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.

DISCUSS: *How does living a disciplined lifestyle reflect God's character? What methods might a person use to stay focused on pleasing God?* (p. 39) Direct attention to **Pack Item 3** (Key Verse: 2 Corinthians 5:20). Discuss how the methods identified can help believers to be better ambassadors for Christ.

READ: Choose someone to read aloud 1 Corinthians 10:31-33, 11:1, inviting the rest of the group to listen for the importance of a positive Christian influence.

- **(10:31)** The whole of a believer's actions are to be carried out to the glory of God. God's glory is His supreme worthiness because of His excellence in all things. He created the world, making humanity in His image to display His glory. He redeemed sinful humanity to display His glory. In return, those who understand something of His greatness and goodness are to live so that God's glory is reflected back to Him. Others too see how believers live, and they are to be pointed to the Lord in whatever believers do.
- **(11:1)** Because Paul had consistently lived in this way, he felt he could encourage the members of the Corinthian congregation to imitate him. At the same time, the apostle was quick to move the attention from himself to Christ.

GUIDE: Lead the group to locate the three action verbs Paul used in 1 Corinthians 10:31-33; 11:1.

SAY: *Paul challenged the Corinthian believers to use their influence to win others to Christ. He called on them to follow his example as he followed the example set by Christ.*

DISCUSS: *What are some practical ways of living out this passage? How can a person honor God in all things with humility?*

MEMORIZE: Call attention to the memory verse for this session (1 Cor. 10:31). Challenge everyone to memorize the verse as a way of remembering that believers represent God by using their influence to bring others to Him.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

REVIEW: Call attention to the summary statement under the session title on page 37 (Believers represent God by using their influence to bring others to Him). Point to the bulleted statements under Apply The Text (p. 40). Lead the group to propose how each bulleted statement relates to the session summary statement.

SHARE: Call attention to the third question set under Apply The Text (p. 40): *List a few people who have had an influence on your spiritual life. What qualities influenced you the most? What specific ways did their actions affect you?* Lead group to list names of people in the margin on their PSG. Invite volunteers to share examples of influence based on the individuals they recalled.

PRAY: Close in prayer, thanking God for His presence and power as believers use their influence to represent Him.

AFTER THE SESSION

Select a time for the group to meet at a local restaurant or coffee shop to continue the discussion about influencing others for Christ. Include 1 Corinthians 10:31, the memory verse, in a reminder communication to the group.

ASSURANCE OF THE RESURRECTION

John 20:2-9; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

FOCUS ATTENTION

DO: In advance, write the following on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper: Terrorist Attack, Bombing, and Identity Theft. As group members arrive, direct attention to the list and lead individuals to reflect on how they feel when reading the words. Begin the session by inviting volunteers to name emotions that accompany the phrases. Write responses on a whiteboard or paper. Comment that like today, life was not guaranteed safe and secure for first-century Christians.

DISCUSS: *Do you feel safer or less safe than you did ten years ago? How is a person's sense of security related to what one is willing to trust for that security?* (p. 45)

TRANSITION: *Paul was well aware that life is unfair and little, if anything, in this life has been guaranteed. That's why he placed all his confidence in the resurrection of Jesus.* Explain that Paul wanted the new believers in Corinth to understand the crucial connection between Jesus' resurrection and the coming resurrection of all those united with the Lord Jesus.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

EXPLAIN: Provide context by explaining that Mary Magdalene, having seen the empty tomb, informed Peter and John that Jesus' body was missing.

READ: As a volunteer reads aloud John 20:3-9, encourage the group to consider the emotions evoked by this passage. Invite volunteers to share responses.

- **(20:3-5)** Throughout the Fourth Gospel, the writer, John, typically referred to himself in the third person. Here he called himself the other disciple.
- **(20:8)** Bolstered by Peter's audacity, John entered the tomb. First he saw, then he believed. He had sufficient evidence to interpret the meaning. As far as the record of the Gospels shows, John was the first one to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead.
- **(20:9)** John was emphasizing that the disciples did not invent the story of the resurrection because of any predetermined view of what the prophecies meant. The statement that Jesus must rise means that the resurrection was God's will. So fixed in the plan of God was the resurrection that He had revealed it to certain of the Old Testament prophets.

GUIDE: Focus on the significance of the linen cloths in verses 5-7. Ask: *How do the details included by John give credence to his account of Jesus' resurrection? Which detail carries the greatest weight or significance for you?* (p. 47)

STUDY: Lead the group to search for action words (verbs) in the passage. Invite the group to name the actions in the order John recorded them.

DISCUSS: *What is the connection between seeing and believing? Can a person believe without seeing? Explain. How can a person believe in Jesus without fully understanding? (p. 47)*

TRANSITION: Call attention to **Pack Item 10** (*Handout: Resurrection Appearances in Scripture*), and say: *The resurrection of Jesus grounds our faith, undergirds our mission, and establishes our hope in the life to come. In nearly all of his letters found in the New Testament, Paul had something to say about the resurrection of Jesus and its impact upon our lives.*

READ: Direct the group to read 1 silently Corinthians 15:20-22, looking for the references to Jesus' death and resurrection.

- **(15:20)** The term firstfruits was taken from the history of the Jewish people. It referred to the first sample of agricultural produce which was an early indicator of the harvest. Among the offerings required by the law was the firstfruits of grain (Ex. 23:19; Lev. 23:10). The firstfruits was evidence of the rest of the harvest, as well as a symbol that the entire harvest was consecrated to the Lord.
- **(15:21)** Paul now moved to a slightly different understanding of the impact of Jesus' resurrection. He developed the concept of the first instance of a particular event as the fountainhead from which a like event issues for a later group. Thus, he considered the impact of Adam's act of sin, which resulted in death to all those humans who came after our first ancestor (Gen. 3:17-19). But now there has appeared in history another human being who has acted in such a way as also to become a fountainhead. Christ was a man just as Adam was. He too achieved something with phenomenal impact on those who followed Him, just as Adam did. He brings about the resurrection of the dead for all who will be raised to eternal life.
- **(15:22)** Adam's action led to death for all those identified with him—his biological descendants. Christ's resurrection leads to resurrection life for all those identified with Him—those who are His spiritual descendants.

GUIDE: Lead the group to locate the bad news (Adam's sin/death) and good news (Christ's resurrection/eternal life) in this passage.

EMPHASIZE: *Paul proclaimed that since death entered the world through one man (Adam), eternal life could be granted through one man as well (the resurrected Christ). Believers find true life through faith in Jesus Christ.*

DISCUSS: *What do these verses reveal about the results of Jesus' resurrection? How do the results identified by Paul give hope? Hope for what?*

READ: Direct the group to listen for a sequence of activities as you read aloud 1 Corinthians 15:23-28. Note that Paul explained, in due time, believers would experience resurrection and the eternal reign of Christ. Every generation of Christians has longed for the return of Christ in its time.

- **(15:23-24)** Just as a harvest of grain occurs in a certain order (firstfruits, then the rest), so it is with resurrection to eternal life. Although there had been others who had been raised prior to Jesus' resurrection, He was the first to be raised never to die again. Second is the group of believers that will be raised afterward at His coming. Again, note that not every human being will be raised; only those who belong to Christ.
- **(15:25-28)** As we observed in John 20:9, Jesus "must rise," that is, His resurrection was God's determined will. Paul used the same verb form that John had used, he must reign. It is the heavenly Father's plan, which cannot be thwarted, that God will put all his enemies under his feet. The image, based on Psalm 110:1, of a general-king forcing his enemies to grovel before him, implies complete conquest.

DISCOVER: Create three teams (an individual can be a team). Assign to each team one of the following Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 15:24; 1 Corinthians 15:25-27; and 1 Corinthians 15:28. Direct each team to locate profound activities that occur as a result of Christ's victorious resurrection and triumphant return. After allowing each team to work, call for a volunteer from each team to share.

DISCUSS: *How does Jesus' resurrection point to His future reign? How does the future complete reign of God give assurance and confidence for living today?*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

TESTIFY: Encourage the group to consider their responses to the questions under Apply The Text (p. 48). Focus on second question set: *Reflect on the time you when you first placed your trust in Jesus (If you have not done so, review the information on the inside front cover to find out more about how you can do this.) With whom can you share about your salvation this week?* Invite volunteers to briefly share their experience with the group.

GUIDE: Display **Pack Item 6** (*Poster: Plan of Salvation*). Use the poster as a guide for reviewing the key elements of praying to receive Christ as Lord and Savior. You may also direct attention to the information on the inside front cover for those who are not yet Christians and want to know more.

PRAY: Lead the group in a sentence prayer, inviting volunteers to pray a sentence praising God for the assurance of the resurrection. Close in prayer, thanking God for His assurance and praying for the group as they share the good news of Christ with others in the coming week.

AFTER THE SESSION

What does Easter mean to you? Reflect on your most memorable celebration of this holy day. How do you personally stay focused on Christ's resurrection?

REMEMBERING THE SACRIFICE

1 Corinthians 11:17-29

FOCUS ATTENTION

DO: Prior to the group's arrival, list on a whiteboard or sheet of paper several memorials or monuments in your area. These may include statues or buildings named for events or people. As the group arrives, point to the list of memorials and ask volunteers to name other memorials they have visited. Add those to the list.

DISCUSS: After most have arrived, explain that on-site memorials often are created following a major event, such as a battle, war, or birth of a famous person. Ask: *What memorial places are special to you? What makes that place special or significant?* (p. 53)

TRANSITION: *Jesus took the occasion of eating the Passover with His disciples to establish a new memorial, the Lord's Supper. In this week's lesson, we'll look at what Paul taught the believers in Corinth about the right and wrong way to remember Jesus' death through the Lord's Supper.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

GUIDE: Point out **Pack Item 4** (*Poster: Problems in Corinth*) and comment that Paul continued to give practical instruction concerning church matters in 1 Corinthians 11-14, especially in relation to aspects of corporate worship. Direct attention to the "Propriety in Church Worship" on **Pack Item 12** (*Handout: Problems in Corinth*). Call on someone to read the section "The Lord's Supper" as a summary introduction for this session's study.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud 1 Corinthians 11:17-22 as the rest of the group listens for how Paul described divisions within the church.

- **(11:17-18)** What troubled Paul was that their manner of coming together reflected deep divisions among them. These divisions were different than the cliques Paul had condemned earlier, based on which human leader people were following. The divisions he had in mind now were economically based: well-to-do versus poor.
- **(11:19)** Paul's comment here—almost an aside—provides a theological framework for what was happening in the congregation: there must be factions among you. He meant that God, in His providence, allows controversy in a church. Why? So that members can come to recognize which teachings (and teachers) are shoddy and which ones are genuine (the term suggests the idea of passing a test).
- **(11:20)** Paul returned to the specific topic at hand: the Lord's Supper. This verse stands out as the only place in the entire New Testament that uses this name for the great Christian ordinance. We

might assume the term is used frequently in the Bible, but not so. Several things may be noted: The adjective translated Lord's stresses a close connection to the Lord Jesus.; The main idea may be "the supper belonging to (or hosted by) the Lord."; The main idea may be "the supper ordained by the Lord."; The main idea may be "the supper at which the Lord's 'body' and 'blood' are shared."

ASK: *What is the major problem Paul was addressing in this passage?*

EXPLAIN: *The intention of the church, of course, was to observe the Lord's Supper as they met together—and Paul had every expectation they would follow his instructions. But instead, at the meal, each one ate ... without regard to other believers. Unlike the observance of many churches today, where the Lord's Supper is part of a corporate worship service, the Corinthian believers included the Lord's Supper as part of a meal they would eat together.*

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 26:26 and Mark 14:22, where Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. Call attention to **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: References to the Lord's Supper*). Direct the group to scan the information on the handout to enhance understanding of the Lord's Supper.

DISCUSS: *What factors contribute to a religious observance becoming misguided? What can be done to keep the focus of a religious practice on God and His purposes? (p. 55)*

TRANSITION: *Paul did not simply rebuke the Corinthians' actions without offering truth to help them recover a right focus on the Lord's Supper.*

READ: Read aloud 1 Corinthians 11:23-36, calling for the group to listen for the way Paul refocused the Corinthians on the meaning of the Lord's Supper.

- **(11:23-24)** Almost all Bible students believe this is the earliest written account of the institution of the Lord's Supper, preceding the composition of the Gospel accounts by at least several years. Further, this is one of the few incidents in Jesus' life that Paul described in detail.
- **(11:24)** Our Lord ordained that His followers are to remember His death by eating the bread and drinking the cup. Jesus instituted this observance at a Passover meal, which commemorated the Israelites' exodus (Ex. 12:14-27).
- **(11:25)** Long ago, the prophet Jeremiah had looked forward to the time when God would establish a new, better covenant with His people (Jer. 31:31-34). The old covenant was the Mosaic covenant. Jesus declared that the new covenant had arrived in His person and death.
- **(11:26)** When we partake of the Lord's Supper in worship and in remembrance, we are announcing to those outside the fellowship of the church that the only way of salvation is by the Lord's death. The Lord's Supper is a visible gospel presentation.

DEFINE: Lead the group to locate the elements of the Lord's Supper in this passage (bread and cup).

EXPLAIN: When believers observe the Lord's Supper, they are remembering and proclaiming the Lord's death until He returns. Point out that 1 Corinthians 11:26 is the memory verse for this week.

DISCUSS: *How can the Lord's Supper be a means of sharing the gospel with others? How does observing the Lord's Supper give a believer confidence in his or her salvation? (PSG, p. 60)*

STUDY: Lead the group to complete the Bible Skill (p. 55). Invite volunteers to share responses to the questions.

TRANSITION: *After recalling Jesus' Last Supper, Paul returned to instructions for the Corinthians.*

READ: Direct someone to read 1 Corinthians 11:27-29, as the remainder of the group notes how Paul guided the Corinthian believers to examine their motives for observing the Lord's Supper.

- **(11:27)** Note that no person is actually worthy of partaking of the Supper. None of us deserves the goodness of the Lord. Yet in another sense, we come worthily when we come as Christ has invited us to come: in faith, in remembrance of His death, and with respect for what the Lord's Supper stands for.
- **(11:27)** In the original situation in Corinth, eating and drinking in an unworthy manner had been a matter of dishonoring the poor of the church, indicated by the gluttony and drunkenness of some wealthy members when they gathered as a church. This is a very serious offense, which Paul described that they were behaving in a way contrary to the purpose for which Christ gave up His body and blood: to provide salvation for all who believe, whatever their economic status. When rich Christians discriminated against poor Christians at the Lord's Supper, they were sinning against those for whom Jesus died. They were sinning against Christ Himself.

DISCUSS: *How might a person approach the Lord's Supper in "an unworthy manner"? What might one do to properly prepare to observe the Lord's Supper? (p. 55)*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

REVIEW: Lead group to review the summary statements under Apply The Text (p. 56). Invite individuals to pick the statement that best describes the biggest insight gained during the session.

DO: Lead the group to answer the second question set under Apply The Text (p. 56): *As a group, list different ways that the Lord's Supper can be taken in a worship setting. Discuss ways the group can encourage each other to participate in the Lord's Supper in a proper way.*

PRAY: Close in prayer, asking God to guide the group in observing the Lord's Supper with worship, with remembrance, and with examination.

AFTER THE SESSION

Mark on your calendar the next date of the Lord's Supper observance at your church (obtain date from your church office). Make a note to contact the group prior to the observance, reminding them of this session and sending the memory verse for this week (1 Cor. 11:26).

SERVING GOD'S PEOPLE

1 Corinthians 12:4-12, 21-26

FOCUS ATTENTION

DISPLAY: As the group arrives, call attention to a display with athletic equipment (examples: athletic shoes, golf ball or baseball, team jersey). As an option, select a music theme (examples: musical instrument, music book, CD). Invite volunteers to name gifted athletes (or musicians).

ASK: *What factors would you point to when thinking about people who are high achievers in their field? What factor do you think plays the biggest role? (p.61)*

TRANSITION: *In this week's study of spiritual gifts, we will learn that God gifts His followers and these gifts are parallel to natural talents in many ways.*

EXPLAIN: Help the group recognize the difference between natural talents and spiritual gifts. Clarify that individuals receive natural talents when they are born biologically, while believers receive spiritual gifts when they are born again through Christ's salvation.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: As you read aloud 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, emphasize the words "different/differences" and "same" each time they are mentioned.

- **(12:4)** The term translated gifts in the original language (*charisma*) is closely related to the New Testament word usually translated "grace" (*charis*). In other words, a spiritual gift comes as a result of God's grace.
- **(12:6)** Three additional points may be noted. First, each person is involved in these things. Spiritual gifts are not limited to some elite class of leaders in the congregation. Second, Paul referred explicitly to each Person of the Trinity: Spirit ... Lord ... God. Just as there is diversity yet unity in God's own self, so there is diversity yet unity in the gifts He bestows. Third, there is a logical relationship between gifts, ministries, and activities. Gifts are the fuel for and lead to ministries, and ministries are the fuel for and lead to activities.

DO: Lead the group to underline all the occurrences of "different/differences" and "same" in this passage. Then invite volunteers to call out the word that follows each use. Note that while gifts, ministries, and activities are different, God is the same.

SAY: *In the body of Christ, not all have the same gifts or assignments, but they do share the same Spirit, the same Lord, and the same God.*

DO: Lead group members to locate the three references to God in this passage (“Spirit,” “Lord,” and “God”). Explain that this represents the Trinity, or God’s three-in-oneness. Direct a volunteer to recall the words to “Holy, Holy, Holy” by Reginald Heber, which is based on the reality of the Trinity.

TRANSITION: *All believers are gifted to fulfill a God-initiated role in the ministry of the church. The Holy Spirit initiates and determines what gifts will be given to what believers. In the next section of verses, Paul discussed specific spiritual gifts.*

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud 1 Corinthians 12:7-10, as the rest of the group listens for specific gifts the Spirit gives to believers.

- **(12:7)** The Spirit Himself is the precious gift given to each believer. His indwelling presence is evidence that we have been truly born again (Rom. 8:9).
- **(12:8-10)** Paul’s list of nine spiritual gifts in these verses should be thought of as representative rather than exhaustive. It may be compared to his list of seven gifts in Romans 12:6-8 (see also Eph. 4:11; 1 Pet. 4:9-11).

DISCUSS: *Identify ways in which a person might use a spiritual gift to benefit himself or herself rather than the church. How can believers guard against those tendencies?*

REPORT: Distribute copies of **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Paul’s Lists of Spiritual Gifts*). Form small teams, and provide paper and pens to each team. Assign each team specific gifts from the handout. Lead each team to use the Bible references listed on the handout to provide insight into each assigned spiritual gift. Invite volunteers from each team to report information to the large group.

SAY: *Believers receive a specific gift that is given at the Holy Spirit’s discretion.*

DISCUSS: *How does knowing that these gifts are given by the Holy Spirit give a believer confidence to exercise that gift? How is receiving a spiritual gift part of a believer’s stewardship?*

TRANSITION: *Each spiritual gift is important to the church and strategically intentional in its placement. Just as the human body must function as one unit, so too must the body of Christ.*

READ: Direct the group to notice the way Paul used the analogy of the human body to describe the unity and diversity of the body of Christ, while a volunteer reads aloud 1 Corinthians 12:11-12, 21-26.

- **(12:11-12)** It’s the Spirit who sovereignly distributes gifts as He wills. We do not get to pick our own spiritual gifts, any more than we picked our own natural talents. This means that no one should feel superior (or inferior) because he or she has (or does not have) any particular manifestation of the Spirit.
- **(12:22)** Paul extended the discussion by focusing on body parts that seem to be weaker and are often not thought about. He didn’t specify which human body parts he had in mind. Whatever the part, it is necessary, once human anatomy is understood. So it is in the congregation. Members

who seem to be weak or unimportant are truly essential. No one in the church, therefore, has the right to look down on another member.

- **(12:23)** Paul also did not specify which human body parts were less honorable or unrespectable. But he spoke immediately of clothing such parts so that they have greater honor or better presentation. Perhaps he thought about how we put rings on fingers and how we can take care to cover our torsos with nice clothing (the main function of which is for the sake of modesty). If someone puts on earrings (and whoever thought earlobes were important?), then surely it's not too much for the church to act similarly. We are to honor persons whom we naturally tend to overlook.
- **(12:26)** Every Christian matters in the life of the church at large—and to other believers individually. Because we are all united to Christ, what happens to one affects the others, whether it involves joy or suffering.

MINI-LECTURE: Present a mini-lecture about Paul's four key claims that weaker or more feeble parts of the body are essential.

EMPHASIZE: *The purpose of spiritual gifts is not to build up individuals, but to benefit the church.* Direct attention to **Pack Item 3** (Key Verse: 2 Corinthians 5:20), and lead the group to discuss how our individual and collective spiritual gifts help us to be better ambassadors for Christ. To further guide the discussion, ask: *How does the variety of gifts in a church give greater value to the giftedness of an individual? Why might a person devalue the role or gift God has given him? How can a person protect himself from devaluing his giftedness?*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

REVIEW: Lead group to review the summary statements under Apply The Text (p. 64). Invite volunteers to name which verses from today's session support each of the statements.

RESPOND: Direct attention to the information about a Spiritual Gifts Survey in the second question set under Apply The Text (p. 64): *Seek to identify the spiritual gift(s) God has given you. (You can find a spiritual gifts inventory in the downloads under the resources tab at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.) How are you using your gift to build up your local church? What actions do you need to take to be more effective?* Encourage everyone to complete the survey following the session.

PRAY: Lead in prayer, thanking God for each believer's special gift from God. Pray for the group as they use their God-given spiritual gifts in Kingdom work.

AFTER THE SESSION

Pray for your group and your church, praising God for the gifts He has given and for those who are using them in His service.

UNDERSTANDING LOVE

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

FOCUS ATTENTION

LIST: Prior to the group's arrival, cut out paper hearts or make copies of a paper with a heart on it. Write "What is love?" on the whiteboard. As the group arrives, give each person a pen and paper heart (or paper with heart on it) and ask him or her to write a response to the question on the board on the heart. Collect the responses.

DO: After most have arrived, read aloud what was written on the hearts. Invite the group to add other responses.

TRANSITION: *While love is a common human experience, agape love is uniquely Christian. Agape is sacrificial giving of oneself to others, whether they deserve it or not. In this week's lesson, we'll seek to understand Paul's view of agape as he challenged the Corinthians regarding the necessity for such love.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Direct a volunteer to read aloud 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, and encourage the rest of the group to listen for how Paul positioned the necessity of love in regard to spiritual gifts.

- **(13:1)** Paul began with an example of an exaggeration in the use of the spiritual gift of human or angelic tongues. It would be rare for a Christian to excel in multiple kinds of speech, earthly and ecstatic. Yet these persons might speak in such a way as to be full of self-importance or desire to build their own reputation rather than to build up others in the body of Christ. They were showoffs. Such speakers are no better off than if they were percussion instruments apart from a band.
- **(13:2)** Paul next mentioned four additional spiritual gifts that can be exercised without love. He was likely referring to specific gifts he had listed in 12:8-10. Prophecy involved speaking the words of God. The phrase understand all mysteries may have been a way of referring to the "message of wisdom" (12:8). All knowledge looked back on the "message of knowledge" (12:8). Faith is an extraordinary ability to trust God. He mentioned these additional gifts with hyperbole. Nobody has all knowledge or all faith.

SAY: *If a person does not have love, the exercise of his or her spiritual gift is useless. Love is more than a feeling but also a willful action.*

GUIDE: Briefly review **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Paul's Lists of Spiritual Gifts*). Then ask: *What would it look like for spiritual gifts to function without love? How would that change the impact of the gifts?*

HIGHLIGHT: Notice that Paul positioned love as a necessity before describing what love is.

DISCUSS: Why do you think Paul tackled these issues before describing what love is? What modern day priorities or activities do we elevate that Paul might have declared to be “nothing” without love?

TRANSITION: Next, Paul presented a series of descriptors to illustrate the nature of the love.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 as the group listens for characteristics of love.

- **(13:4-5)** Patient—This means enduring difficult people, rather than being patient with circumstances. It is part of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22); Kind—This is similar to patience but deals with the manner with which we treat others more than the time it takes to deal with difficult persons.; Does not envy—Admiring others for their positive qualities or desiring to have such qualities for ourselves may turn into resentment or jealousy.; Not boastful—It means bragging about one’s own achievements.; Not arrogant—The essence of pride is self-importance and a refusal to submit to God or others.; Not rude—Love is courteous. Rudeness is never acceptable for the one who loves others as Christ did.; Not self seeking—Love is the opposite of putting oneself in first place. We are called to esteem others ahead of ourselves.; Not irritable—Those who love aren’t touchy or easily offended.; Does not keep a record of wrongs—Paul may have known that Jesus taught the importance of forgiving others “seventy times seven” (Matt. 18:22).
- **(13:6-7)** Finds no joy in unrighteousness—Sadly, it seems to be human nature to gloat over the misfortune of others, whether disaster or evil.; Rejoices in the truth—Love includes being happy when we see others living in line with the truth of the gospel.; Bears all things—The verb is capable of two meanings. It may mean “endure” or “cover, protect.” If Paul meant the former, then love puts up with offenses. If he meant the latter, then love covers over the weaknesses of others.; Believes all things—When we love, we give others the benefit of the doubt rather than believing the worst about them.; Hopes all things—Hope means that we believe God will work things for good.; Endures all things—Love is not quenched by the offenses and failings of others.

CHART: Follow the directions in the Bible Skill activity on page 71 to create a chart: *Review 1 Corinthians 13 and create a chart. In one column, list words and phrases that are not characteristic of love. In a second column, list words and phrases that are characteristic of love. What insights do you gain by comparing the two lists? Are any opposites included? What action gives you the greatest trouble? Which action do you find the most significant?*

ILLUSTRATE: Use information above to illustrate the significance of each characteristic. Note that the negative descriptors connect with the lifestyle being exhibited by the Corinthian believers. Ask: *How are these characteristics of love, negative and positive, demonstrated in today’s world?*

SAY: *God is characterized as love, and those that follow Him should exhibit that same kind of love.*

GUIDE: Point out **Pack Item 3** (Key Verse: 2 Corinthians 5:20). Lead in a discussion of how God being love impacts our words and actions with others as His ambassadors.

DISCUSS: *How is the description given by Paul seen in God's character? How does substituting the word "love" with "God" give you a better understanding of the relationship between the love defined by Paul and the character of God? (p. 71)*

READ: Direct someone to read aloud 1 Corinthians 13:8-13, asking the group to listen for Paul's evidence that love is permanent.

- **(13:8)** Love never ends because it is rooted in the eternal God. Love existed when there was only God. Thus in this life, when we love like God does, we are engaging in an eternal activity.
- **(13:9-10)** God has never revealed everything to a particular prophet, or to all the prophets combined. Those filled with wisdom or knowledge, no matter how brilliant or supernaturally gifted, have never received all knowledge. This is simply part of the earthly human condition. At some point in the future, such gifts as knowledge and prophecy will come to an end.
- **(13:12)** Our knowledge of Christ and heavenly things in this life is genuine but only partial. Paul longed for the time that he would know fully. He and all God's people will know the Lord intimately and as fully as is possible for a finite being to know Him. Just as Christ already knows believers fully, so there is coming a time when we will have as full a knowledge of God as we can attain.

SAY: *Paul contrasted love with other things valued by the Corinthians, emphasizing that of all the things valued on earth, only love is eternal.*

CHART: Lead the group to add additional characteristics of what love is and is not, based on the passage, to the chart.

SAY: *Believers should base their lives on things that have an eternal duration, with love being one such item.*

DISCUSS: *What is the relationship between faith, hope, and love? Can a person have faith, hope, and love apart from a relationship with Jesus? (p. 71)*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

REVIEW: Recall the paper heart exercise completed at the beginning of the session. Invite volunteers to answer the question "What is love?" with insight gained during the study. Read the three bulleted statements under Apply The Text (p. 72).

DO: Call attention to the second question set under Apply The Text on page 72. Encourage each person to identify one thing he or she can do to help your group better demonstrate this kind of love.

PRAY: Close in prayer, asking God to help the group act on the actions identified during the session.

AFTER THE SESSION

Contact the group during the week, reminding them to use their gifts motivated by love.

ENJOYING GOD'S COMFORT

2 Corinthians 1:3-14

FOCUS ATTENTION

WELCOME: Create two signs that say "Comfort Zone" and "Out of Comfort Zone." Place both signs on a focal wall. As the group arrives, ask the following questions and record responses on the appropriate signs: *What kinds of situations would you consider to be in your "comfort zone"?* (p. 77) *What things have you recently attempted that were "outside your comfort zone"?* *What are the advantages of staying in your comfort zone and of going outside your comfort zone?* (p. 77)

SAY: *The Apostle Paul undeniably lived outside his comfort zone as a traveling church planter. As we'll see in this week's session, he needed comfort and praised God for the comfort that came from both God and others.*

PRESENT: Distribute **Pack Item 2** (*Outline: 1, 2 Corinthians*) and point out that this week's session begins a study of 2 Corinthians. Use the third paragraph in Understand the Context (p. 75) to help set the context for 2 Corinthians. Distribute **Pack Item 7** (*Handout: Corinthians Time Line*), and briefly review the events under AD 50–57, the time of Paul's writing of 2 Corinthians.

TRANSITION: *Paul's love and concern for the Corinthians is evident in this letter. This study explores his desire for them to know God's comfort in order to endure suffering.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

EXPLAIN: Note that Paul had been delayed in visiting the Corinthian church because of sufferings he faced that benefited them and honored God.

READ: As you read aloud 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, encourage the group to listen for Paul's attitude toward sufferings and difficulties.

- **(1:3)** Paul adopted a prayer style from the Old Testament, for example Psalm 41:13: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting." The apostle, however, provided a New Testament modification by describing God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. As followers of Jesus, we relate to God as the One who sent Jesus to our world.
- **(1:4)** In the original language of this verse, the word for "comfort" occurs four times. A verb form is found three times: He comforts . . . we may be able to comfort; and we ourselves receive (literally, "we ourselves are comforted"). Both noun and verb are closely related to the title for the Holy Spirit that Jesus initiated in such verses as John 14:16; 15:26; 16:7. This title has been translated "Comforter," "Helper," "Advocate," and "Counselor."

- **(1:6)** The comfort that Paul had received from God strengthened him to persevere, which in turn channeled God's comfort to the Corinthians when they were afflicted. They saw Paul's example and went through the same sufferings that he endured. Because they witnessed Paul's receiving God's comfort, they too were comforted in a way that resulted in endurance in difficult circumstances.

DISCUSS: *How would Paul's description of God as a "Father" bring comfort to the Corinthians? How does God demonstrate His character when a person is in the middle of a crisis or difficulty? How does a person's attitude when facing suffering influence others? (p. 79)*

GUIDE: Lead the group to locate in verses 5-7 two reasons that Paul said the affliction and comfort in his life would be useful for the Corinthians' comfort.

DISCUSS: *How might the sufferings of a believer be used by God to impact the lives of others?*

MEMORIZE: Distribute **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark*). Encourage the group to memorize 2 Corinthians 1:4 as a way of remembering that believers can be comforted when facing sufferings because God is present and using those experiences to impact others.

TRANSITION: *God's purposes for trials in the lives of His children are for a reason. Paul listed situations that highlighted his weakness as a human in contrast with overcoming God's power as demonstrated through the gospel.*

READ: Direct the group to read 2 Corinthians 1:8-11, underlining the words Paul used to describe his emotions.

- **(1:11)** He wrote to the Corinthians about their role in his deliverance and what the immediate outcome had been. The Corinthian believers had helped him by their prayers. Prayer is a resource God has provided to His people. He longs for His people to pray and intercede on behalf of others.
- **(1:11)** Further, when God answers the specific prayers of Christians, there is meant to be an outburst of thanksgiving and praise to God because of the gift of God's answer to the petition. Paul reminded the Corinthians that their prayers for him had helped him and had truly brought praise to God.

DISCUSS: *What situations might cause a person to feel completely overwhelmed? How would you compare those situations to the situations faced by Paul?*

SAY: *Paul passed a test of faith, growing as a result of what he faced in Asia. Believers can celebrate a testing of their faith, knowing that God will strengthen them and demonstrate His power.*

SHARE: Write on the board: *Not trust in _____ but in _____*. Ask group to search verse 9 and fill in the blanks (ourselves, God). Lead group to consider times they have learned to trust in God rather than themselves. Invite volunteers to share brief testimonies.

READ: Invite a volunteer to 2 Corinthians 1:12-14 while the group listens for actions that point to Paul's integrity.

- **(1:12)** With this verse Paul pivoted from his praise to God (1:3-11) to the body of the letter. As he began explaining why his travel plans had changed, he chose to begin by making a strong statement: his actions sprang from a clear conscience and full integrity. He boldly asserted his confidence in his behavior.
- **(1:13)** Some persons in the Corinthian congregation thought Paul's preaching and his writings were intentionally obscure or even misleading (see his vehement refutation in 2 Cor. 11). Here, he was making the point that his objective in his letters was to be a clear communicator.
- **(1:14)** The term translated pride is the same noun rendered "boast" in verse 12. Paul longed for the Corinthians to have confidence—righteous boasting—in their relationship with him as the one who had first brought the gospel to them and then helped them mature in the faith. Furthermore, Paul already beamed with what we might term fatherly pride in the Corinthians.

EXPLAIN: *Paul called for Corinthian followers to accept him as a proven apostle, even though he had been delayed in his visit. His integrity seems to be at stake. Even though he had poured his life into this church, they still only partially understood him and his ministry among them.*

DISCUSS: *What is the relationship between a person's integrity and our willingness to accept their role in kingdom work? What would be a greater source of pride: being a person of integrity or being recognized by others for the work you do?*

DIRECT: Refer to verse 14 and say: *Paul isn't boasting in himself or his own human wisdom. Rather, he admits that anything good and praiseworthy is because of God's grace.* Invite a volunteer to read aloud 1 Corinthians 15:10.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

REVIEW: Lead in a review of the bulleted statements under Apply The Text (p. 80). Invite volunteers to select the statement that best describes the insight they most need to take to heart. Encourage them to share what they selected with another person in the group.

PLAN: Call attention to the first question set under Apply The Text (p. 80): *Discuss with your group ways God is encouraging your group members through someone who is suffering and the way they are facing that suffering. What can your group do to be encouragers to others?*

PRAY: Lead in a time of silent prayer, during which you read aloud the second and third question sets under Apply The Text (p. 80). Invite group to prayerfully consider their responses.

AFTER THE SESSION

Make it a priority to read through the entire book of 2 Corinthians this week to provide good context for the session.

DISPLAYING THE GOSPEL

2 Corinthians 4:5-18

FOCUS ATTENTION

GUIDE: Prior to the group's arrival, list on the board: birth control, same-sex wedding cakes, headscarves at work, and prisoner's beads. Begin the session by asking group to guess what the topics on the board have in common. After responses, explain that they reflect disputes over religious liberty in American culture.

DISCUSS: *Do you agree or disagree that religious liberty is declining? What actions should be taken in places where Christianity is actively persecuted or suppressed?* (p. 85)

EXPLAIN: Christianity was not tolerated as a legal religion anywhere in the Roman Empire of the first century. Direct attention to **Pack Item 11** (*Handout: Key Idols in Corinth*) to provide background on Paul's environment. Locate the different temples to the gods in the city (listed on the handout) on **Pack Item 5** (*Map: Reconstruction of Corinth*).

TRANSITION: *When Paul wrote to encourage believers who faced persecution, he was dealing with a much more challenging cultural situation than any of us have faced. Amid these challenges, Paul focused on how God was shaping him and using him to face the gospel.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: As you read aloud 2 Corinthians 4:5-6, ask the group to listen for words that describe what Paul was and was not proclaiming.

- **(4:5)** Those who acknowledge Jesus as Lord have bowed to His lordship. They have become His servants, loyal and obedient. Paul noted that he had been called to serve the Corinthians for Jesus' sake. He was first of all Jesus' servant; he would therefore serve others if that was his Master's bidding. His ministry was not primarily for their sake but for Christ's.
- **(4:6)** Paul preached Jesus rather than himself because he had become a new creation. He compared what had happened to him spiritually to what had happened when God created the heavens and the earth. He recalled that God's creative work began by calling forth the light. In like manner, God called forth the light of the gospel into Paul's spiritual darkness. In the gospel, Paul had received revelation about the true nature of God's glory—His greatness and worthiness to be praised.

DISCUSS: *What is the difference between Paul commending himself and proclaiming himself to the Corinthians? Where is the line between defending our testimony and proclaiming one's self?*

MINI-LECTURE: Refer to 2 Corinthians 3:7-13, Exodus 34:29-35, and Hebrews 1:3 and emphasize that Paul said God's glory isn't merely on Jesus' face but is in His face. Say: *Moses' face was veiled, but Jesus' face is shining brightly to overcome the darkness in our hearts. Christ alone is the one to proclaim!*

ASK: *What are the implications and consequences for proclaiming someone or something other than salvation in Christ alone? (p. 87)*

READ: Invite a volunteer to read 2 Corinthians 4:7-15, as the group listens for ways Paul contrasted human weakness with God's power.

- **(4:7)** On one hand, being transformed by Christ is like light shining in our hearts. Paul developed the analogy, however, by likening himself (and other believers) to clay jars. Earthenware vessels were common in Paul's day, and it wasn't unknown for jewels or other expensive items to be hidden from view in ordinary pottery. In Paul's illustration, however, the point was not to keep the treasure hidden, but rather to contrast the value of the gospel with the frailty of the gospel messengers.
- **(4:10-12)** Paul was constantly mindful of the death of Jesus as it impacted him. He was equally aware of Jesus' resurrection to life. Paul also experienced the resurrection life of Jesus throughout his ministry (even as he waited for his own final resurrection). Not only in this life but also in the resurrection, Paul was characterized by the life of the living Lord Jesus. Further, the Corinthians had also begun to experience this life as well.
- **(4:14)** In verse 14 the apostle's thoughts turned to confidence about his future life in the presence of the Lord forever. How could he be sure of this? Because the one who raised the Lord Jesus had promised to do so. Those who are united with Jesus in His death are also united to Him in His resurrection (Eph. 4:2-7).

EXPLAIN: Direct attention to Verse 7. Explain that "treasure" is valuable and costly, while "clay jars" are weak and common. The weakness of the vessel (clay jar) allows God's extraordinary power to be shown to be from God and not from us.

GUIDE: Read Verses 8-9 responsively. Read, or enlist someone to read, the phrases that begin with *We are _____*, (stopping before the word *but*) and instruct the rest of the group to complete the phrase by reading *but not _____*.

APPLY: Lead group members to reflect on the challenges or difficulties they are facing. Instruct them to write in the margin *I am _____*, briefly describing their situation in the blank. Then suggest that they complete the rest of the phrase (*but not _____*) by writing words that reflect God's power.

DISCUSS: *How might the threat of death impact a person's faith? How can potential persecution strengthen a believer's resolve to take a stand for Christ?*

TRANSITION: *Paul didn't dwell on death, but instead magnified life.*

DISCUSS: *How would Paul define a win for himself? For other believers? How should believers understand success in this life? (p. 87)*

READ: Invite a volunteer to read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 as the group listens to the way Paul contrasted life on earth with eternal life in heaven.

- **(4:16)** All believers, along with Paul, have received the indwelling Spirit as the down payment of their inheritance (see Eph. 1:14). Spiritual blessings are ours already, but we have not yet received full salvation. Only when we receive our resurrection bodies at Christ's return will we fully reach the endpoint of day-by-day renewal.
- **(4:17)** Paul was further strengthened in his daily struggles by giving them an assessment from the perspective of heaven. They were merely a momentary light affliction. This no-big-deal evaluation contrasted with his assessment of his struggles from an earthly perspective. He judged them as insignificant when measured by the absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory waiting for him.
- **(4:18)** Paul further explained the value of his chosen focus. If he had paid attention to the visible, he would have been looking at things that are temporary. They will all disappear when Christ returns. By fixing his spiritual gaze on what is unseen—everything that believers will enjoy after the resurrection of the body—Paul kept the eternal before him. The future blessedness of believers will never end.

ASK: *How does the inner person get renewed daily? How does that daily renewal fuel and motivate the believer?*

SAY: *Paul challenged the Corinthian believers to focus on the unseen and the eternal. He reminded them that doing so would produce an incomparable reward in heaven.*

DISCUSS: *How does the glory reserved for the believer later serve as motivator in the now to be faithful and courageous in suffering? (p. 87)*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

GUIDE: Read the three bulleted statements under Apply The Text (p. 88). Invite the group to propose additional insights that could be added to the list.

CHALLENGE: Encourage the group to consider their responses to the first question set under Apply The Text (p. 88): *What action do you need to take to safeguard against proclaiming anyone other than Jesus? Discuss with the group ways you can hold each other accountable for making it about Jesus. Lead the group to brainstorm potential actions they can take individually and as a group.*

PRAY: Thank God for His grace through which believers can face life with confidence.

AFTER THE SESSION

Pray for each member of your group by name, asking God to help them face life with confidence and display the gospel in challenging situations.

BECOMING NEW

2 Corinthians 5:16-21; 6:1-2

FOCUS ATTENTION

LIST: As the group arrives, invite them to name occasions for which people send greeting cards. List the topics on the board (examples: birthday, Christmas, wedding, anniversary, graduation, baby birth, illness, death). Begin the session by asking volunteers to name the last greeting card they sent or received and the relationship it represented. (Likely Mother's Day, given the day this session will be studied.) Point out that humans are relational by nature. It seems that the closer the relationship, the greater the hurt if that relationship is broken.

DISCUSS: *Can any broken relationship be fixed? How does the restoring of a once broken relationship change the people who once were at odds with each other? (p. 93)*

INTRODUCE: *In this study, we'll see that Paul thought deeply about reconciliation and insisted that genuine reconciliation comes only through a right relationship with Jesus.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: As a volunteer reads aloud 2 Corinthians 5:16-17, encourage the group to listen for how Paul described the change in people that occurs through Christ.

- **(5:16)** Salvation altered Paul's view of others. He framed this change using a phrase that he did not use anywhere else in his letters, stating that he now did not look at others from a worldly perspective. In this phrase, he meant the typical way people think of each other; that is, according to appearances and according to the worldly prejudices by which people evaluate others as if bodily existence is all that really matters. From now on means from the time that his understanding of the meaning of Christ's death had changed at his conversion. Paul now had a new, eternal perspective on people. He saw them as a new creation.
- **(4:17)** Those who have trusted in Christ are now in Christ, in a vital relationship with Him. This means that they are a new creation. They have begun the transformation process that will culminate at the resurrection at the end of the age.

EMPHASIZE: *Paul described the results of salvation in terms of being made new. Only through faith in Jesus can a person be made new and move away from what he or she once was.*

EXPLAIN: *Being saved, or born again, means that believers are now considered to be in Christ. At the same time, Christ is said to be in believers. Being united with Christ involves both aspects, revealing a complementary relationship between our being in Christ and Him dwelling in us.*

ASK: *What are the benefits of being united with Christ? How does being united with Christ change how a person lives daily?* (p. 95)

COMPARE: Lead group to read 2 Corinthians 5:17 aloud in unison. Ask: *What actions and characteristics point to a person being made new as a result of faith in Jesus?*

READ: Direct the group to read 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 silently in their Bibles, looking for forms of the word reconcile.

- **(5:18)** The apostle shifted his attention, moving from salvation in terms of new creation to presenting it in terms of reconciliation to God. Everything refers to the changes Paul had just described: new life and a changed perspective about Christ and others. God had taken the initiative in salvation, which means that He has reconciled us to Himself.
- **(5:19)** What does it mean that reconciliation between God and mankind came through Christ? Paul explained. God Himself brought reconciliation about, and this impacted all the world. Its impact was not limited to a particular group or to a particular time. Rather, once and for all God worked through Christ's death to remove the enmity between God and humanity.
- **(5:21)** Many Bible students consider this verse to be one of the most significant summaries in Scripture of the meaning of Christ's death. Paul was explaining the connection between Jesus' crucifixion and reconciliation with God. The statement is both profound and paradoxical.
 - **He made.** The initiator of reconciliation was God Himself. He began the peace initiative.
 - **The one who did not know sin.** Jesus was the sinless Son of God, yet also fully human.
 - **To be sin.** Jesus did not actually become a sinner on the cross. Rather, Paul meant that Jesus became an offering for sin (see Num. 6:14; Isa. 53:4-5,10).
 - **For us.** Paul was using the language of exchange or substitution. Jesus took our sins upon Himself. The Old Testament sacrificial system had prefigured this (Lev. 5:5-10).
 - **So that ... we might become the righteousness of God.** Here is the other side of the exchange. Believing sinners receive more than forgiveness of sins. They receive righteousness as a gift from God. As Paul had written, they are a "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17).
 - **In him.** Reconciliation occurs only for those who have been joined to Jesus Christ by faith. The benefits of His death are applied not universally but to those who receive it in the way God has instituted (1 Cor. 1:30).

DEFINE: Call on a volunteer to look up the definition of *reconcile* on an electronic device. Then share this definition: *The restoration of a relationship that has been broken or severed; the reunion of parties separated by the consequences of sin or wrongdoing.* Point out that God initiated reconciliation, He achieved it, and He applied it to our lives.

DISCUSS: *How can being reconciled to God serve as motivation for serving Him, living as a new creation? What does God initiating this reconciliation reveal about God's love for humans? How should the love God demonstrates motivate us to serve Him?*

GUIDE: Search 2 Corinthians 5:20-21 and locate what God calls believers to do in light of His reconciliation.

EMPHASIZE: Draw attention to **Pack Item 3** (*Key Verse: 2 Corinthians 5:20*). Read the verse on the poster, and then say: *We are ambassadors for Christ—to share His message of reconciliation. Who better to entrust this message of reconciliation than to those who have tasted of it for themselves!*

DISCUSS: *How does being reconciled to God qualify a person to be an ambassador by the reconciliation available to others?* (p. 95)

READ: Direct the group to listen for the way Paul emphasized the urgency of reconciliation as you read aloud 2 Corinthians 6:1-2.

- **(6:1)** The apostle believed that genuine believers will not lose their salvation (Eph. 4:30; Phil. 1:6), but he was not persuaded that all the persons connected to the Corinthian congregation had truly come to Christ. It's essential for all who profess Christ to demonstrate that they possess Christ. If they falter and turn back from following Christ, their apparent receipt of the gospel will be shown to be empty.

ASK: *What are some reasons people may give for waiting to accept the gospel?* (p. 95)

CLARIFY: *Paul reminded his hearers that the time to act on God's offer is when they hear the message.* Stress that he did not imply that the Corinthians were in danger of losing their salvation.

GUIDE: Lead group to compare Isaiah 55:6-7 with 2 Corinthians 6:2, looking for references to readiness. Say: *The message of reconciliation with God is too important to overlook or push off for another time.* Ask: *What can be done by a believer to emphasize to others the urgency for accepting Christ?* (p. 95)

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

REVIEW: Invite volunteers to share insights gained as you call out the three section titles for this study (Reborn, Reconciled, Ready). Then read the statements under Apply The Text (p. 96).

GUIDE: Call attention to the second question set under Apply The Text (p. 96). Select one or two ideas for follow up during the week.

PRAY: Use the third question set under Apply The Text (p. 96) as a prayer guide. Lead the group to list things God has provided. Close with a time of silence, leading learners to reflect on someone with whom they need to make an urgent effort to share Jesus.

AFTER THE SESSION

Connect with the group this week, encouraging them to follow up on actions identified during Summarize and Challenge to help others know about reconciliation with God.



GIVING FAITHFULLY

2 Corinthians 9:1-15

FOCUS ATTENTION

SHARE: Begin the session by asking, *Who is the most generous person you know? What makes you consider this person generous?*

DO: Invite a volunteer to read the first paragraph on p. 101.

DISCUSS: *Why might a person question a person being generous? What motivates people to be generous toward others? (p. 101) Say: One doesn't need to be rich to be generous, but one simply must be generous to be generous.*

EMPHASIZE: *The Lord sometimes can use money to expose the condition of our hearts. For many, riches and wealth are a hindrance to entering the kingdom of God.*

MINI-LECTURE: Share a mini-lecture based on information under Understand the Context (p. 101) about the Jerusalem church's financial challenges and the Corinthians' response to the "collection for the saints."

TRANSITION: *In 2 Corinthians 9, Paul commended the Macedonian churches for their generosity and called the Corinthians to recommit themselves to giving to this need.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: As you read aloud 2 Corinthians 9:1-5, encourage the group to listen for how Paul expressed belief that the Corinthians would resume commitment to the offering.

- **(9:1)** Here, in one word, ministry, Paul summarized the way he thought about the collection for Christians in Jerusalem. It was an opportunity for service.
- **(9:3-5)** The Corinthians must have promised to collect a large sum of money, which Paul called a generous gift. The term he used can also be translated "blessing." The money was to be their response to God's grace in their lives, as the apostle had argued in 8:6-9. Knowing that the Corinthians might be fickle, however, Paul mentioned again the brothers preceding him to arrange in advance the offering.

CLARIFY: Note that Paul was not criticizing the Corinthians, but encouraging them to keep a commitment they had made in the past to participate in this offering.

DISCUSS: *What problems might arise if Christians fail to provide for the needs of others? Why is it important for leaders to hold believers accountable for meeting the needs of others? (p. 103)*

READ: Direct the group to read silently 2 Corinthians 9:6-11 and locate benefits of giving as God directs.

- **(9:6-7)** Paul emphasized that the Corinthians were not under any biblical law in the matter of giving. The Holy Spirit was to guide the conscience of the individual givers. Paul made two positive assertions. First, the individual has the responsibility, under God, to do as he has decided in his heart. No person can lord it over another's conscience in this matter. Second, God loves a cheerful giver (another proverbial statement; see Prov. 22:9). Those whose give joyfully are thereby expressing contentment in the way God has blessed them materially.
- **(9:8-9)** Paul focused on God's ability to meet material needs, rather than offering guarantees about financial prosperity: God is able. His language is broadly inclusive, as the terms overflow . . . in every way . . . always, and everything indicate. Yet Paul noted that God's grace—understood here in the sense of material blessings—extends to what believers need, rather than to what they want. Sometimes believers receive everything material they desire, but this is not what God has promised. His promise is that He will supply so that such blessings may in turn be channeled to others.
- **(9:10-11)** Other Scriptures came to Paul's mind. Isaiah 55:6 spoke about God's provision of seed for the sower and bread for food for His people. Hosea spoke about the importance of God's people sowing righteousness, that is, doing good deeds (including generosity), which would "reap faithful love," including the Lord's sending "righteousness on you like rain" (Hos. 10:12).

HIGHLIGHT: Emphasize that Paul described giving that is motivated by the gospel. His motivation was not receiving, but rather the blessed act of giving itself. Read aloud Acts 20:35, where Paul appealed to Jesus' teaching on this subject.

DO: Lead the group to complete the Bible Skill activity (p. 103). Focus especially on 2 Corinthians 9:9 and Psalm 112:9. *Discuss: How do the words of the psalm support what Paul wrote concerning generous giving?* (p. 103)

SHARE: Summarize Paul's distinction between voluntary giving and giving out of compulsion. Invite volunteers to share experiences when they received or observed someone giving cheerfully.

ASK: *For the cheerful giver, which comes first, the gift or the cheer? How is giving a source of cheer? How does a cheerful heart move a person to meet the needs of others?* (p. 103)

GUIDE: Emphasize that giving is one of the gifts of the Spirit by referring to **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Paul's List of Spiritual Gifts*). Note from the pack item that giving is discussed in Romans 12:6-8. Direct a volunteer to read that passage. Ask: *What does that passage say about our giving?*

TRANSITION: *Paul reminded the Corinthian believers that God would be glorified and honored, using their gifts to demonstrate His faithfulness.*

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud 2 Corinthians 9:12-15, while the group listens for the outcome of giving to others (to glorify God).

- **(9:12-13)** Giving thanks to God is one aspect of glorifying God, that is, acknowledging His supreme value. Two facets of the Corinthians' giving would display God's glory in a way others could see. First, their generosity in sharing with needy believers would be the proof provided of the genuineness of their faith (see 2 Cor. 8:8). Outward giving was evidence of inward life change. (Paul was certainly not suggesting that financial contributions can somehow help buy salvation.) Second, their giving would demonstrate ongoing growth in Christ, as an expression of obedience to the confession of the gospel.
- **(9:14)** Paul mentioned added benefits the Corinthians could expect as a result of their generosity. Other believers would pray for them, would think more highly of them (have deep affection for you), and would recognize God's work in calling them to salvation (the surpassing grace of God in you).

STUDY: Direct the group to read 2 Corinthians 9:12-15, underlining words that describe the Corinthians' act of giving and its results.

DISCUSS: *How can giving be an act of worship? How can giving be a means of honoring God? How can the person receiving a gift honor God?*

SAY: *All Christian giving is carried out in light of God's indescribable gift to us: His Son.* Invite a volunteer to recite John 3:16. Ask: *In what ways does God's generosity in the gift of His Son challenge believers to meet the needs of others?* (p. 103)

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

GUIDE: Call attention to the three bulleted statements listed under Apply The Text (p. 104). Lead the group to propose how each bulleted statement relates to the session summary statement.

DO: Lead the group to respond to the first question set under Apply The Text (p. 104): *As a group, discuss appropriate ways of challenging each other to meet the needs of others in the community and to meet the needs of the church. What adjustments need to be made within the group based on this discussion?* Pick one or two adjustments for which your group can develop action items. Schedule a time to make plans to implement these actions.

PRAY: Lead in a time of silent prayer, during which you ask God to guide the group in meeting the needs of others and of the church. After the silent prayer, invite the group to read aloud 2 Corinthians 9:15.

AFTER THE SESSION

Spend concentrated time in prayer for those in your group who are struggling financially. Pray that this session will help them trust in God to provide for their needs as well as inspire them to use their resources to help others.

FINDING STRENGTH

2 Corinthians 12:7b-10; 13:2-8

FOCUS ATTENTION

ILLUSTRATE: Prior to the group's arrival, create a display of snack foods over which people might say they can't control themselves (examples: chips, candy). As the group arrives, invite them to sample the snacks and name their favorite irresistible snack or favorite food.

CLARIFY: Note that self-control over snacks is a small representation over the recurring temptations or besetting sins with which some people struggle.

DISCUSS: *What are the most common weaknesses or recurring temptations believers face? How does a weakness or recurring temptation impact a person's spiritual life?*

SAY: *In this week's study, we'll see that Paul had struggled with an ongoing issue. He referred to this as a "thorn in the flesh." Paul shared insights learned through his own struggles, showing how God's strength is available when we confront our weaknesses.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Guide the group to listen for Paul's attitude toward his thorn in the flesh, or weakness, as a volunteer to read aloud 2 Corinthians 13:7b-10.

- **(13:7b)** First, Paul called the difficulty a thorn in the flesh. The challenge Bible students face is knowing whether he meant "flesh" in the sense of his physical body or in the sense of his lower, sinful nature. Second, he referred to the difficulty as a messenger of Satan. Some Bible students take this to refer to Paul's persecutors, whom the devil constantly sent Paul's way. Third, Paul described the difficulty as ongoing and excruciating. He wrote that it came to torment him.
- **(13:8-9)** In Paul's case, the answer from the Lord was not what he prayed for but actually turned out to be much better. When he received the Lord's answer, he stopped praying for the thorn to be taken away. Whatever our circumstances, we are to remember that God has extended His favor, undeserved, toward us. Indeed, it is only because of His grace that we were saved from eternal destruction.
- **(13:10)** The five kinds of trouble that Paul mentioned reinforce each other. Taken together, they summarize the apostle's demanding work as a traveling missionary.

EXPLAIN: Paul did not identify what the thorn in the flesh was. Note that it likely was a physical issue that annoyed Paul and, at times, caused difficulties to his ministry.

SAY: *God allowed Paul's thorn in the flesh to remain as a reminder of Paul's need for dependence upon God and His grace. Paul viewed his weakness as a source of strength.*

DISCUSS: *How does God use weaknesses and thorns to bring about His purposes and to shape a believer? How does a weakness cause believers to grow in their trust of God? (p. 111)*

READ: Read aloud 2 Corinthians 13:2-4, calling for the group to listen for the content of Paul's warning.

- **(13:2)** Paul had devoted much time and energy to the Corinthian congregation. He invested a year and a half when he planted the church (Acts 18:11). When he learned about their troubles, he wrote 1 Corinthians. Sometime after that, he returned to them on what he called a "painful visit" (2 Cor. 2:1). On that occasion, he gave a warning to the church that they needed to repent; later he sent Titus as his ambassador (7:5-7). Now he was writing another letter, and again he found himself in the situation in which he must give a warning, this time from a distance.
- **(13:2)** The warning was addressed to those who sinned before and were still unrepentant. These were the people in the congregation who had not responded to his instructions in the first epistle and on his painful visit. The phrase "I will not be lenient" points to Paul's willingness to engage in disciplinary action against those who stubbornly remained in their sins.
- **(13:3-4)** Whatever the Corinthians may have thought about Paul as a weak man or weak preacher (1 Cor. 1:27-28), they could never think that Christ Himself had been weak toward them. Rather, He had been powerful among them (1:4-8). Christ has all authority; He had shown the power of His gospel among the Corinthians. Yet there was a time when weakness seemed to be His dominant characteristic. That was when He was crucified. In humbling Himself by taking on the sins of humanity, He submitted to the most horrible of deaths. However, that was momentary. He was raised and now forever lives by the power of God. Paul knew that his weakness was parallel to Christ's own experience. It was only because of Paul's spiritual union with Christ (in him) that he was able to make the comparison.

CLARIFY: Use information above for brief background about why Paul gave a warning to the Corinthians. Explain that Paul was not bullying the Christians or seeking to terrify them with his authority; rather, he was trying to build them up.

ASK: *What role should church leaders play in holding believers accountable for spiritual growth? What is the responsibility of the individual when challenged to grow spiritually?*

DISCUSS: Note that Paul warned those who doubted his authority that his authority was being demonstrated by the power of the gospel among the Corinthian believers. Lead group to recall times they have seen the power of the gospel demonstrated, whether through your church or elsewhere.

ASK: *How is discipline an act of love? If God failed to discipline His followers, would He be viewed as weak or strong? (p. 111)*

READ: Direct someone to read 2 Corinthians 13:5-8. Guide the rest of the group to listen for how Paul challenged the Corinthian hearers to examine their faith, looking for evidence of their salvation.

- **(13:5)** Paul’s critics in Corinth had in effect subjected him to a test of apostleship: Was he truly an apostle of Jesus Christ? They had demanded that he give them proof of his spiritual authority. Now Paul turned the tables. It was they, not he, who needed to be given an examination.
- **(13:5)** Paul wanted the Corinthians to ask themselves two questions: First, are you in the faith? By the faith, Paul meant the Christian faith, that is, faith looked at objectively as a system of beliefs and behaviors (as in 1 Cor. 16:13, “stand firm in the faith”; see also 1 Tim. 4:1; 6:21). The second test question was this: do you recognize that Jesus Christ is in you? If Christ indwelt them through the Holy Spirit—as is the case with all genuine believers (Rom. 8:9)—then marks of His presence should be evident.
- **(13:7)** wanted them to do what is right. His primary concern was with the congregation, not with his own reputation. It was a matter of secondary importance to him that he appear to pass the test of authenticity by the members of the congregation.

CLARIFY: Encourage people to carefully examine their spiritual lives without casting unnecessary doubts. Ask: *Why might a person test his or her faith? Why might it be important for them to do so?*

SAY: *It’s not about whether Paul appeared to pass the test. What is important is whether or not the Corinthians themselves demonstrated Christ in the midst of their trials.*

DISCUSS: *What is the difference between approaching others to convince them that you are right and approaching them so they can be right? How is the way in which a person approaches another person a test of faith and maturity for the approaching person? (p. 111)*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

REVIEW: Call attention to the summary statement under the session title on page 108 (Believers can trust in God’s strength when confronted with their weaknesses). Invite volunteers to suggest ways this truth is demonstrated in today’s Bible passage. Point to the bulleted statements under Apply The Text (p. 112). Lead the group to propose how each bulleted statement relates to the session summary statement.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Pack Item 2** (*Outline: 1,2 Corinthians*) and **Pack Item 7** (*Handout: Corinthians Time Line*) to position this as the final session in this thirteen-session study. Invite volunteers to share brief insights from the study of 1 and 2 Corinthians.

PRAY: Lead in a time of silent prayer, inviting group to reflect on areas in which they are weak. Close by thanking God that we can trust His strength when we are weak.

AFTER THE SESSION

Connect with the group via email or social media to remind them of the memory verse (2 Corinthians 12:9) and journal activity for this session.

VISUAL IDEAS

These items are available on the CD-ROM in the *Explore the Bible: Leader Pack* as PDFs where you may use the text to create your own handouts or PowerPoints for your group.

Pack Item 1: Map: Paul's Second Missionary Journey

Sessions 1,9

Use the map on page 155 or locate a map in a Bible atlas that shows the missionary journeys of Paul.

Pack Item 2: Outline: 1,2 Corinthians

Sessions 1,2,8,9,13

Refer to the outline printed on page 12.

Pack Item 3: Key Verse: 2 Corinthians 5:20

Sessions 4,7,8,11

Display 2 Corinthians 5:20 on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper.

Pack Item 4: Poster: Problems in Corinth

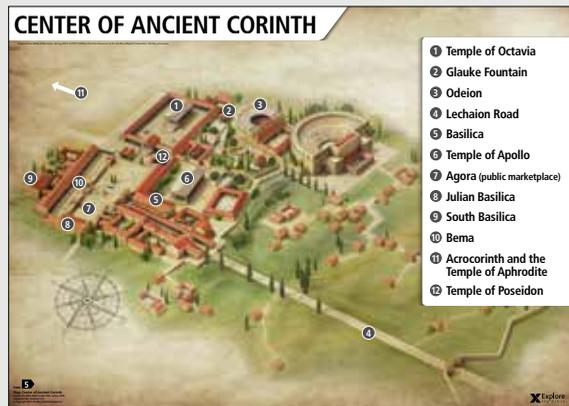
Sessions 1,3,4,6

Create a poster that lists the following information: Those Who Bring Division in the Church; The Treatment of Fellow Christians Living in Sin; Matters of Sexuality in Marriage and Divorce; Disputes About Food; Propriety in Church Worship; Spiritual Gifts; The Resurrection

Pack Item 5: Map: Center of Ancient Corinth

Sessions 2,10

Use a Bible atlas to locate the primary locations inside ancient Corinth, paying particular attention to the locations of the temples.



Explore the Bible: Leader Pack Sample

Pack Item 6: Poster: Plan of Salvation

Session 5

Create a poster that lists the following information from page 2: Admit to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning away from your sin.; By faith receive Jesus Christ as God's Son and accept Jesus' gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross.; Confess your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Pack Item 7: Handout: Corinthians Time Line Sessions 2,9,13

Locate a study Bible with a time line of the major people and events in 1 and 2 Corinthians (from 1,000 BC–AD 57). Use it as a reference during this study.

Pack Item 8: Handout: Paul's List of Spiritual Gifts

Sessions 7,8,12

Create a poster of each of the spiritual gifts, as listed in the following Scriptures: Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10; 1 Corinthians 12:28-30; and Ephesians 4:11.

Pack Item 9: Handout: References to the Lord's Supper

Session 6

Use a Bible dictionary to explain the meaning of these terms: Lord's Supper; Eucharist; Communion; Fellowship

Pack Item 10: Handout: Resurrection Appearances in Scripture

Sessions 5,6

Create a handout of the following people who encountered the risen Jesus and the related Scripture references. Cephas (Luke 24:34); The Twelve (Luke 24:36-43); The 500 (Acts 1:9-11); James (Acts 15:13); Apostles (John 20:24-29); Paul (Acts 9:1-9)

Pack Item 11: Handout: Key Idols in Corinth

Sessions 3,10

Use a Bible dictionary or handbook to provide information on some of the gods worshipped in Corinth: Apollo; Aphrodite; Poseidon; Serapis; Asclepius



Explore the Bible:
Leader Pack Sample

Pack Item 12: Handout: Problems in Corinth

Sessions 1,4,6

Use a Bible handbook to provide further information on these problems in Corinth: Those Who Bring Division in the Church; The Treatment of Fellow Christians Living in Sin; Matters of Sexuality in Marriage and Divorce; Disputes About Food; Propriety in Church Worship; Spiritual Gifts; The Resurrection

Pack Item 13: Bookmark: Memory Verses

Sessions 1-13

Make a list of the suggested memory verses on p. 7 to distribute to your group:

COMING NEXT QUARTER

2 Samuel

- Session 1** **Respected** > *2 Samuel 1:22-27; 2:1-7*
- Session 2** **Crowned** > *2 Samuel 3:8-21*
- Session 3** **Celebrated** > *2 Samuel 5:9-12; 6:12-19*
- Session 4** **Established** > *2 Samuel 7:8-21*
- Session 5** **Valued** > *2 Samuel 9:1-13*
- Session 6** **Accountable** > *2 Samuel 12:1-14*
- Session 7** **Grieved** > *2 Samuel 13:15-20,31-39*
- Session 8** **Deposed** > *2 Samuel 15:10-16,24-30*
- Session 9** **Restored** > *2 Samuel 19:1-15*
- Session 10** **Averted** > *2 Samuel 20:1-2,14-21*
- Session 11** **Resolved** > *2 Samuel 21:1-6,10-14*
- Session 12** **Thankful** > *2 Samuel 22:26-36,50-51*
- Session 13** **Disciplined** > *2 Samuel 24:10-25*

Paul's Second Missionary Journey



"Paul's Second Missionary Journey" is adapted from Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded, page 1230 © 2015, B&H Publishing Group. Used by permission.

1,2 Corinthians

Disunity threatened to tear the church apart. That was just the tip of the iceberg. A church member was engaging in immoral practices—the kind of immorality that was not even tolerated among the unbelievers—while the church tolerated it. Things were taking place during worship that were destructive and harmful. There was confusion about spiritual gifts, with members claiming their gifts were proof of spiritual superiority. Welcome to the church at Corinth. If you're the apostle Paul, what do you say to such a church? Like a father, you sternly correct them. But first you remind them of who they are in Christ, and who Christ is. You call them back to the gospel. Therein lies the answer to the moral, relational, and theological problems that plagued the Corinthian church—or any church.



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