



Explore the Bible.®

Spring 2018 > *Clint Pressley, General Editor*



1, 2 Corinthians

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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TWO WAYS TO USE QUICKSOURCE

➤ AS A SUPPLEMENT TO THE EXPLORE THE BIBLE LEADER GUIDE

1. After completing your study using the commentary provided in the *Explore the Bible Leader Guide*, consult the Exploring Key Words section and the Talking Points page for additional insight or as a review.
2. After creating your initial plans for guiding the group time using the suggestions included in the Leader Guide, supplement and refine your plan using the ideas found in *QuickSource*. You will also want to consult the Explore the Bible blog (LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible) or Explore the Bible MinistryGrid page (MinistryGrid.com/web/ExploreTheBible) for additional ideas.

➤ AS YOUR PRIMARY RESOURCE FOR PREPARING TO LEAD A SMALL BIBLE STUDY GROUP

1. Read and study the core passage.

Use Exploring Key Words on the first page of the session content to gain an understanding of the passage. Consult a study Bible and a Bible commentary like the *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* (available at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible in both print and digital formats) to gain additional insight into the passage.

2. Review the outline provided on the Talking Points page (page 2 of each session).

Record ideas and insights gleaned from your personal study time. Note: You may want to make a photocopy of the Talking Points page so you can use *QuickSource* again in the future.

3. Review the questions on the Discussion Plan page (page 3 of each session).

Identify the questions you believe would work best with the group you are leading. Reword the selected questions to reflect your personality and the personality of the group. Record the reworded questions on the Talking Points page (or the photocopy you made of the page) next to the point related to the question. Remember to arrange the questions so that you are leading the group to a conclusion or action.

4. Consider ways of using the Object Lesson idea (page 4 of each session).

Brainstorm other ideas sparked by the object lesson suggestion.

5. Read the Dig Deeper feature (page 4 of each session).

Add insights gained from this page to the Talking Points page.

6. Use the *Personal Study Guide* (PSG).

Scan a copy of the *Personal Study Guide* (PSG), looking for additional questions and the Bible skill feature. Consider ways of incorporating the Bible skill into the session, recording your ideas on the Talking Points page. Record additional questions from the PSG on the Talking Points page as well.

7. Review and refine.

Consult the Explore the Bible blog (LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible) or Explore the Bible Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/web/ExploreTheBible) for additional ideas.

8. Arrive early.

The group time starts when the first person arrives. Make sure you are that person so you can set the tone and direction for the group Bible study time.

9. Lead the group in a time of Bible study.

Carry the Talking Points page into the class, using this page as your guide for leading the group.



INTRODUCTION TO 1,2 CORINTHIANS

When Paul planted churches, they were the first congregation ever to exist in that city. He targeted Corinth for a year and a half, and a vibrant congregation sprang up (Acts 18:1-21). A few years later, however, Paul learned that not all was well among the new believers. There were divisions. Immoral practices had crept in. Christians were confused about issues such as spiritual gifts and the role of women in worship. Paul wrote both letters we are studying for the next three months to urge these believers to take the steps necessary so that they could become spiritually healthy, both individually and in their church life.

Both the Book of Acts and the letters to the Corinthians help us to understand the context and origin of these epistles. They are, of course, not just ancient correspondence. They are God's inspired word to us, and both letters have always been included in the list of books Christians consider to be the authoritative letters of the apostle Paul. They are relevant to all believers, whatever kind of congregation we are connected with, not merely to those in new church plants.

» 1 CORINTHIANS

Writer—The author of both 1 and 2 Corinthians named himself as “Paul” and as “apostle of Jesus Christ.” That is all we need to know to identify him as the one introduced in the Book of Acts as an early tormentor of Jesus’ followers who was profoundly transformed after encountering Christ on the way to Damascus (Acts 9). After several years in which he matured in his faith, Paul (also known as Saul of Tarsus) was sent out to plant churches in several Roman provinces. He also composed important letters both to congregations and to individuals. Thirteen New Testament letters bear Paul’s name in the greeting. In 2 Timothy, Paul indicated he expected to die soon. According to tradition, he was martyred during Nero’s rule in the AD 60s.

Destination and First Audience—Corinth was a large commercial city in a prime location on the narrow Isthmus of Corinth that connected the mainland of Greece to the Peloponnesian Peninsula to the south. The city therefore profited considerably by controlling both land and sea routes. In the first century, it was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia. As in other cities of the Empire, the citizens were both sexually permissive and quite religious, building and supporting many temples to various deities. The gospel arrived in Corinth around AD 50, as part of Paul’s second missionary journey. He arrived there after establishing churches in the Macedonian cities of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea (Acts 16–17) and after proclaiming the gospel in Athens (Acts 17). The church planting team included Paul, Silas, and Timothy, as well as a Jewish-Christian couple, Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:1-5).

Date—When we compare Acts 19 (about Paul’s church-planting ministry in Ephesus) and 1 Corinthians 16 (about Paul’s circumstances as he wrote the letter), we can work out that the apostle composed this letter near the end of his two years in Ephesus as part of his third missionary journey (Acts 19:10; 1 Cor. 16:5). Though we cannot know with certainty, we can estimate that Paul likely wrote 1 Corinthians around AD 55.

Occasion—From the letter itself, we are told of several factors that prompted Paul to write: he had received a report from Chloe’s household that the church had divided into competing factions (1:11-12); it had been reported to him that the believers were tolerating sexual immorality (5:1); and he had received a written list of questions, possibly sent by three Corinthian men who visited Paul in Ephesus (7:1; 16:17). Paul wrote to address these issues, apparently with the secretarial assistance of Sosthenes and with Timothy serving as the letter carrier (1:1; 4:17).

Important Themes—Christian unity, sexual morality, women’s roles, spiritual gifts, and the resurrection. Uniquely for this letter, Paul used the term translated “about” to introduce a change in subjects: male and female in marriage (7:1); virgins (7:25); food offered to idols (8:1); spiritual gifts (12:1); the financial collection (16:1); and Apollos (16:12).

➤➤ 2 CORINTHIANS

Writer, Destination, and First Audience—These are the same as 1 Corinthians.

Date—Acts 20:1-2 indicates that when Paul completed his church-planting ministry in Ephesus, he went next to Macedonia and then on to Greece. In 2 Corinthians 7:5-7, Paul described that when he arrived in Macedonia, he received news about the Corinthian Christians because Titus met him there. Apparently Paul wrote from Macedonia sometime around AD 56, perhaps a year after he wrote the first letter.

Occasion—From the letter, we learn that Paul heard about false apostles who were causing trouble in Corinth and leading the believers astray (11:13-15). He wrote a stinging letter of rebuke (2:3-4), an epistle now lost to us. Afterward, he was anxious to discover whether his letter was effective and the Corinthians had turned from their foolishness. Finally he received good news from Titus (7:5-7). Most of the believers had repented. Paul thus wrote 2 Corinthians expressing his relief, but also addressing other important issues such as the financial collection. He evidently used the secretarial assistance of Timothy and sent the letter by Titus (1:1; 8:17).

Important Themes—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.

OUTLINE 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)

SESSION 1

UNITED IN CHRIST

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 **a** no divisions among you, and that you be **b** united 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 **c** Chloe's people, that there is **d** 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 **e** Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." ¹³ Is Christ divided? **f** Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in Paul's name? ¹⁴ I thank God that I **g** 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 **h** preach the gospel — not with **i** eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ will not be **j** emptied of its effect. ¹⁸ For the word of the cross is **k** foolishness to those who are **l** perishing, but it is the power of God to us who are **m** being saved. 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 **n** believe 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 **o** stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles. ²⁴ Yet to those who are **p** 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.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- 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** Where Chloe lived and how her people learned of the situation in Corinth is unknown.
- d** "Quarreling" (ESV); "contentions" (NKJV)
- e** Aramaic for "Peter" (John 1:42), he was one of Jesus' inner circle whose ministry was one of grace, forgiveness, and restoration.
- f** Paul clarified that Jesus was the One who was crucified.
- g** Baptism is an act of worship and obedience (Matt. 28:19). The original Greek word means "to immerse."
- h** The gospel boldly proclaims Jesus' sinless life, sacrificial death, resurrection, and divine invitation.
- i** "Clever speech" (NLT); human skills and abilities void of the Spirit's power
- j** "Made ineffective [deprived of its saving power]" (AMP; see 1 Cor. 1:18)
- k** "Absurd and illogical" (AMP). The cross doesn't make sense to the lost person's mind.
- l** Those who are spiritually dead; outside of Christ
- m** Salvation through Christ means justification (have been saved), sanctification (being saved), and glorification (will continue to be saved).
- n** Many know facts about Jesus, but the Lord's divine mission is to help people become His followers.
- o** Salvation is by grace, not by human works, church affiliation, or religious deeds (Eph. 2:5,8-9).
- p** The gospel message is an invitation for all people to be saved through faith in Jesus (Luke 19:10).

» 1. CALL FOR UNITY (1 Cor. 1:10)

- Paul challenged the Corinthian believers to be united based on the central conviction of Christ's crucifixion.
- Emphasize that Paul was focusing on basic doctrinal convictions and goals as opposed to unity of opinions about everything.

» 2. CONTEMPT FOR DIVISIONS (1 Cor. 1:11-16)

- Paul shared that divisions existed in the Corinthian church based on personalities (religious leaders).
- Paul illustrated his contempt by asking rhetorically if any of these personalities, himself included, were capable of providing salvation.

» 3. THE CROSS THAT DIVIDES (1 Cor. 1:17-25)

- Paul stated that the only true dividing line in humanity is between those who depend upon the world's wisdom and those who depend upon Christ.
- He reiterated that only through the cross of Christ can one secure salvation.

» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

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

- 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.



FOCUS ATTENTION

Describe your experiences in a close-knit, unified group, as well as your experiences in a divisive situation. How did the unity impact how others perceived that group?

- Unity is important in the church, because Jesus encouraged unity among His disciples as a witness to the world of their connection to God.
- Paul promoted unity in the church at Corinth because he understood how divisiveness would destroy the church's witness of Christ. Paul believed it was evidence of sin.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE 1 CORINTHIANS 1:10

What difference does it make that Paul addressed the Corinthians in the name of Jesus Christ?

- Paul used the name of Jesus nine times in the first ten verses of this chapter.
- Paul referred to the believers in the church of Corinth as "saints, with all those in every place who call on the name of Jesus Christ" (v. 2) to enforce the basic doctrine of Christ that unified them with one another and with believers throughout the world.

What did Paul's exhortation indicate that the Corinthians understood about God and His ways?

- Paul addressed divisive behavior within the church at Corinth, exhorting them to "be united with the same understanding and the same conviction" (v. 10).
- The Corinthian believers evidently misunderstood what God required of them as they demonstrated a lack of understanding about how they should love and serve God and others.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:11-16

What part does selfishness play in the Corinthian believers' identification with different leaders?

- Selfishness is at the heart of divisive spirits.
- Believers at the church in Corinth were boasting with pride about specific leaders they followed.
- The leaders identified by Paul were Apollos, Cephas (Peter), Christ, and Paul himself.
- Even though the Corinthian believers identified with Christ, their actions did not demonstrate the nature of Christ, who advocates that all believers be united with each other.

What purpose did Paul's rhetorical questions serve?

- Paul challenged the Corinthian believers to recognize the false doctrine that their divisiveness showed they believed.
- The truth is that Christ is not divided, Paul did not die for their sins, and they were not baptized in Paul's name.

Why was Paul glad he did not baptize many of the Corinthians believers?

- Those baptized by Paul did not have an advantage over those baptized by other ministry leaders.
- Paul's lack of total recall of those he had baptized showed that baptism should not be used as an essential qualifier for becoming a member of the church.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:17-25

According to Paul, what makes preaching ineffective?

- Those who preach to impress others with flowery or eloquent speech lose the message of the cross to become lost. The listeners become caught up in the antics of the preacher.
- Through a genuine presentation of the gospel, people will either reject or accept salvation through Jesus Christ.

In what ways does the cross divide?

- Paul revealed that those who were unsaved did not take the message seriously, but believers in Christ saw the gospel as powerful. He also placed knowledge about the cross in two categories: the wisdom of God and the wisdom of humankind.
- Paul contrasted human wisdom with God's wisdom. Human wisdom does not allow people to know God and be saved, but God's wisdom centered on the cross and resulted in salvation.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

In light of Paul's instruction to the Corinthian church, what can today's church do to eliminate factions within the church and strengthen unity?

- The body of Christ should be of one mind.
- Church leaders should not be held in higher esteem than Christ.
- The work of the church should not be centered around personalities. Church leaders should preach and teach the unadulterated message of the cross, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Seek the wisdom of God rather than the wisdom of humankind.
- **Personal Challenge:** Evaluate your attitude toward fellow church members. Do you cultivate divisiveness, or do you promote unity? Put Christ first, and encourage love among believers. In unity, believers should glorify Christ so that others will receive salvation.



OBJECT LESSON

A ROLL OF CREPE PAPER

Before the group arrives, use crepe paper to divide the room into four sections. Wrap the crepe around groups of chairs. Make four signs with the words *tall*, *short*, *smart*, and *funny*. Tape one sign to a chair in each section to identify the groups.

As group members arrive, explain that the chairs have been divided into sections. Then ask each person to take a seat in the group they believe best describes them: tall, short, smart, or funny. Help members to choose the most dominant description if they believe they would fit in more than one group.

Ask: *Would sitting based on the groupings help or hurt our relationships?* Ask group members to demonstrate how they can unify the room once again. Encourage them to embrace members who were in different groups.

Explain: *Church members sometimes create unseen walls that divide them, based on likes and dislikes, gossip, favoritism, and so much more. These walls prevent effective ministry and can be a deterrent to outsiders who may be seeking a church home or, more importantly, Christ. Paul's encouragement to the divisive Corinthian*



church to be intentional about unification is also for today's church. Because we share the same knowledge and understanding about Christ and salvation, we should be unified.

Remove the crepe paper, and say: *Tearing down the walls that divide us can be just as easy as removing crepe paper, if we remember the message of the cross that saved us and will save others.*



DIG DEEPER

THOUGHTS FROM A PASTOR

Immaturity weakens God's church, division breaks God's heart, and gospel-focused preaching changes people's lives. Paul spoke truth to the Corinthian church. He wanted God's people to face reality. The problem wasn't salvation; the concern was sanctification. God's people weren't maturing in the faith. The writer of Hebrews declared a similar message. He said, "We have a great deal to say about this, and it is difficult to explain, since you have become too lazy to understand. Although by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the basic principles of God's revelation again. You need milk, not solid food. Now everyone who lives on milk is inexperienced with the message about righteousness, because he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature—for those whose senses have been trained to distinguish between good and evil" (Heb. 5:11-14). While Paul's message was bold and straightforward, it was delivered by "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15).

Many churches today lack maturity and unity. Can those churches experience revival, renewal, and revitalization? Is there hope for a local church seeing decline and brokenness? I've pastored several diseased, divided, dysfunctional churches. Members lacked evidence of spiritual growth; division plagued the church's fellowship; and people continued to ignore and reject the call to repentance.

In a spirit of love, I preached God's truth to those churches. In God's time, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, He transformed lives, healed relationships, and produced growth. To God be the glory!

Paul's words remain relevant for churches today.

- A call to unity is essential. Church leaders need to speak God's truth in love and invite God's people to turn from division and seek unity.
- A need to face reality is urgent. If God's church is filled with strife and immaturity, then churches need to do whatever it takes to help God's people face reality. Denial is a tool of the enemy.
- A focus on biblical preaching is imperative. Churches need to remember that God's truth changes lives. As Jesus bled and died on calvary's cross, He defeated death and Satan's schemes. God promised that His Word would never "return ... empty" (Isa. 55:11).
- A passion for God's glory is healthy. Christians need to serve Jesus in His strength, not their own. As the church heals, grows, and matures, the glory goes to God, not to human leaders.

God is the One who sends revival, renewal, and revitalization. Therefore, there's hope for divided, deceived, and dysfunctional churches.

SESSION 2

GLORIFYING GOD

1 CORINTHIANS 6:12-20

¹² “Everything is **A permissible** for me,” but not everything is **B beneficial**. “Everything is permissible for me,” but I will **C 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 **D sexual immorality** but for the LORD, and the LORD for the body. ¹⁴ God raised up the LORD and will also raise us up by **E his power**.

¹⁵ Don’t you know that your bodies are a **F 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 **G joined to a prostitute** is one body with her? For Scripture says, The two will become one flesh. ¹⁷ But anyone **H joined to the LORD** is one spirit with him. ¹⁸ **I 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 **J temple** of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were **K bought at a price**. So **L glorify God** with your body.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** “Allowed to do” (NLT); “the right to do” (NIV); “technically legal” (MSG). This describes what is lawful.
- b** “Not everything is good for you” (NLT). The meaning behind this word is “helpful.”
- c** “Not be brought under the power” (KJV); “not be dominated” (ESV).
- d** The Greek word is *porneia*, meaning adultery, fornication, pornography, and other means of abusing God’s design for sex.
- e** The Greek word is *dunamis*. God is able and capable. “Nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37).
- f** “Members of Christ” (ESV). Christians are united with Christ.
- g** “Members of a prostitute” (ESV); “harlot” (KJV). Being united with someone outside of Christ.
- h** “United” (NIV). The term relates to the idea of becoming “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24).
- i** The thought is to “run” (NLT, AMP). It’s like Joseph saying, “So how could I do this immense evil, and how could I sin against God” (Gen. 39:9). To flee is a vital aspect of following God’s will.
- j** Our bodies are God’s sanctuary. “Sacred place” (MSG).
- k** 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).
- l** 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).

» 1. FOCUSED ON CHRIST'S LORDSHIP (1 Cor. 6:12-14)

- Paul declared that actions may be permissible but not beneficial.
- He reminded the Corinthian believers of the folly of being controlled by temporal things such as food and sexual appetites.

» 2. JOINED WITH CHRIST (1 Cor. 6:15-17)

- Paul reminded the Corinthians of their union with Christ, contrasting that sacred unity with the perverted union of sexual promiscuity.
- Emphasize that the marriage union is a mirror of the relationship we are to have with the Father.

» 3. BOUGHT WITH A PRICE (1 Cor. 6:18-20)

- Paul challenged the Corinthian believers to run from sexual immorality.
- He reminded them that they were sanctuaries for the Holy Spirit.
- Because of the price Christ paid to secure their salvation, they were to honor Him with how they used their bodies.

» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

Believers honor God through holy living.

- 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.



FOCUS ATTENTION

How would you characterize our culture's view of immorality?

- The Bible provides ample wisdom and counsel about immorality; however, Christians have fallen short in learning and using this knowledge to impact their lives and the lives of those around them.
- Before Christ, the Corinthian believers may have been entangled in unrighteousness, but their conversion removed the desire to participate in immorality. However, one believer had either continued to sin or returned to it, and the church had not dealt with the sin.
- Through Paul, this session provides an understanding of what God wants Christians to do regarding immorality, especially sexual sin. He challenged the Corinthian believers to embrace God's standard of holy, righteous living.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

1 CORINTHIANS 6:12-14

How did Paul correct the Corinthian believers' misunderstanding about Christian freedom?

- Christians should not use their freedom in Christ from Mosaic law as a license to sin. The Corinthian believers were engaged in sinful practices, thinking they had the freedom to do so.
- Paul clearly stated that unbelievers will not receive eternal life, because they practice all types of immorality. Paul wanted Christians to know it also mattered how they lived while on earth.

What had the Corinthian believers' misunderstood about the purpose of the body?

- Food is for the body and sex is for the body are not the same thing.
- God's plans for the body do not include gluttony, sexual immorality, or other ungodly practices. The body is for the Lord's purposes.

1 CORINTHIANS 6:15-17

What did Corinthian believers misunderstand about their bodies?

- The Corinthian believers thought what they did with their bodies was of no consequence to their relationship with Christ.
- Sexual immorality links sin to the body of Christ, causing reproach and disgrace.

What did Corinthian believers misunderstand about the nature of sex?

- Just as a husband and wife becomes one through sex, a believer becomes one with a person through a sexual encounter.
- Nothing satisfies more than our relationship with Christ, which unites us with God.

1 CORINTHIANS 6:18-20

What must the Corinthian believers do to strengthen their ability to flee sexual immorality?

- Paul advised it is possible to overcome the power of sexual immorality by simply running from it. In spite of Joseph's spiritual strength, even he ran when confronted with sexual immorality (see Gen. 39:7-21).
- Believers must not take chances when faced with sexual immorality. It is powerful, and one cannot reason with it.

How did Paul urge the Corinthian believers to view their bodies?

- Sexual immorality has a deep spiritual impact on one's body, because of the nature of this sinful act. It physically and spiritually corrupts the inside of the body, while other sins corrupt the outside of the body.
- The bodies of believers are sacred vessels that house the Holy Spirit. Therefore, our bodies should be treated with honor and respect.
- Salvation redeems our souls and our bodies from sin with a price that no human could pay. Jesus paid the price; therefore, He is the rightful owner of our bodies.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

Unless one lives in a vacuum, no one can escape the widespread exposure of immorality in today's culture. How can Paul's challenge to the Corinthian believers strengthen our resolve to resist the practice of immorality and live holy before God?

- As Christians, biblical principles and standards should guide our behavior so that we honor God in everything we do. We should especially follow sound biblical principles for moral purity.
- The bodies of Christians are part of the body of Christ; therefore, we should not engage in sinful acts, especially sexual immorality. If we do, then we are disgracing our Savior, because we have caused Him to be linked with sin.
- Because God owns our bodies, we should make every effort to take care of them, being mindful of what we eat, what we do, what we watch, and what we say.
- **Personal Challenge:** As Christians, we should all resolve to honor God by the way we live. We should guard our minds from the influence of immorality. This means filtering what we watch on television and other media as well as being careful what we read. Believers are not immune from the power of sexual immorality. We must aggressively turn away from every temptation.



OBJECT LESSON

A PLATE OF COOKIES

Bring a plate of cookies, and place it on a table in front of the group. Ask: *When does eating become a sin?* Explain: *The Bible reveals that gluttony is a sin. Biblically defined, gluttony is excessive eating or drinking. That means eating a cookie can be sinful, when a person chooses to eat more than he or she should.*

Ask: *What do you believe to be the problem with overeating? Why don't people, including Christians, take gluttony seriously?* Say: *Overeating can certainly result in bad health, and based on Paul's teachings, God wants us to take care of our bodies, which is the temple of the Lord. But consider also the connection between our physical bodies and our spirit.*

Ask rhetorically: *Is excessive eating a symptom of other issues in our lives? Are our physical appetites indicative of being unable to control other areas of our lives—our tongue, habits, and so forth?*

Gluttony is among a list of sins that Paul named—also including sexual immorality, idolatry, adultery, homosexuality, thievery, drunkenness, abusiveness, and deceitfulness—speaking to the serious nature of it. As Christians, who should honor God through



holy living, we need to think the way God does about controlling our appetites just as we seek to keep ourselves from other sins.



DIG DEEPER

A CALL TO HOLINESS, NOT HAPPINESS

Certain subjects are off limits in many churches. When was the last time you heard a sermon on repentance, holiness, or purity? Perhaps your church has been silent. On the other hand, contemporary culture hasn't been quiet. Turn on the television and see how sex sells. Hamburger commercials glamorize risqué behavior. Primetime shows portray immorality as normal. Secular media continues to scoff at traditional views of marriage.

Paul said, "Flee sexual immorality" (1 Cor. 6:18). Are church leaders calling people to experience happiness or pursue holiness? Paul, without hesitation and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, called Corinthian believers to pursue holiness. Many people shy away from the Book of Leviticus. It's not a popular devotional read. However, God calls His people to "distinguish between the holy and the common" (Lev. 10:10). God says, "For I am the LORD your God, so you must consecrate yourselves and be holy because I am holy" (Lev. 11:44).

The Greek word for "sexual immorality" is *porneia*. God's people are to flee fornication, adultery, pornography, and incest. What was Paul's point? Why should church leaders call people to pursue holiness? A believer's lifestyle should look different from that of a non-believer. The evangelistic thrust of many churches is declining.

Why are local churches struggling to reach the lost? One answer is the absence of Christlikeness. Many believers look like the world, not like Jesus. Yet God calls His children to be like Jesus (Rom. 8:29).

How can you call listeners to go deeper?

1. Proclaim the message of holiness. Holiness isn't about being weird. It's about being obedient. God loves to see His children following Him with total surrender.

2. Equip people to handle temptation God's way. The call to "flee" is a call to handle temptation the right way. Believers need to look for God's way out when tempted. He "is faithful" (1 Cor. 10:13).

3. Issue a call to repentance. Sexual immorality remains a battle for many believers. It's one click away on a keyboard. Our God forgives (Ex. 34:6-7), truth is powerful (John 8:32), and Jesus sets people free (John 8:36).

4. Help people understand the price of salvation. Salvation is "God's gift" to us (Eph. 2:8), but it isn't free. Our redemption cost Jesus His life. He bled and died and "takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Personal holiness leads to God's glory.

You've been given a divine assignment. As God equips, call His people to pursue holiness, not happiness.

KEEPING COMMITMENTS

For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.

1 CORINTHIANS 7:1-13

¹ Now in response to the matters you wrote about: “It is good for a man **a not to use a woman for sex.**” ² But because sexual immorality is so common, each man should have sexual relations **b with his own wife**, and each woman should have sexual relations with her own husband. ³ A husband should fulfill his **c 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 **d 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 **e lack of self-control.** ⁶ I say this as a **f 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 **g should marry**, since it is better to marry than to burn with **h desire.** ¹⁰ To the married I give this command — not I, but the LORD — **i 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 **j a husband is not to divorce his wife.** ¹² But **k I** (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, **l she must not divorce her husband.**

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** “Not to have sexual relations with a woman” (NIV).
- b** Paul appealed for sexual activity to be expressed in its biblical context of marital fidelity.
- c** “Conjugal rights” (ESV); “the marriage bed must be a place of mutuality” (MSG). Sexual needs are to be met in the context of marriage.
- d** “Abstaining” (MSG); “defraud” (KJV). To “deprive” is the agreement to fast from sexual activity for a divine spiritual purpose and time.
- e** Lacking self-control is a failure to display “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22-23). Mankind can’t overcome sexual temptations by human strength.
- f** “Permission” (KJV). Paul gave his opinion, or suggestion, to the readers.
- g** 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).
- h** “Lust” (NLT); “passion” (ESV; AMP). God clearly calls His people to overcome lust, not to be “trapped by [our] own desires” (Prov. 11:6). God’s people need to handle temptation His way (1 Cor. 10:13).
- i** “Separate” (ESV); “depart” (NKJV). Paul meant that a married couple shouldn’t separate or divorce.
- j** “Leave” (NLT); “to get rid of” (MSG).
- k** Paul shared his heart, establishing moral boundaries for the church. Paul’s words carried theological weight among believers in Corinth.
- l** 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.

»» 1. MARRIAGE AND INTIMACY

(1 Cor. 7:1-7)

- In response to a previous letter, Paul directed the Corinthian believers to remain faithful to their spouses after conversion, including in matters of intimacy.
- He focused on practical reasons, reminding them of the sexual temptations present outside of marriage.
- Emphasize that sex and marriage are gifts from God and affirm sex as being reserved for marriage between a man and woman.

»» 2. MARRIAGE AND SINGLENESS

(1 Cor. 7:8-9)

- Paul commended celibacy to the Corinthian believers, pointing to his own marital status.
- Paul affirmed marriage for those who were not given the gift of celibacy on practical terms related to temptation.
- Characterize Paul as being single at the time of this writing, but that he was most likely a widower, to account for his being a Pharisee. Explain that those who stay single should be celibate.

»» 3. MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

(1 Cor. 7:10-13)

- Paul directed married individuals who had been separated and since accepted Christ to seek to restore that relationship or remain celibate.
- Those who were married to an unbeliever were directed to remain married to their spouse if the unbelieving spouse was willing to do so.
- Be careful to affirm marriage between a man and a woman without condoning mistreatment or tolerating 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.

»» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

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

- 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.



FOCUS ATTENTION

What advice would you give a man and a woman who just got engaged?

- Good marriages involved keeping God at the center, quality time, communication, connection, and more.
- Cultural changes have weakened the institution of marriage, including changes that make it easy to obtain a divorce. Many couples marry, citing divorce as a backup plan if faced with problems in the marriage.
- Paul instructed Corinthian believers on marriage and divorce, debunking the false views they held.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

1 CORINTHIANS 7:1-7

How do these verses address today's issues about marriage?

- Corinthian Christians had been impacted by their culture. Sexual immorality in Corinth was unchecked, and sexual temptations were everywhere. For this reason, the Corinthian believers had questions, and Paul provided answers.
- Paul emphasized immediately that men should not have sexual relations with anyone but their own wives.
- In Paul's view, God provided for the natural sexual urges of men and women through the institution of marriage—a God-ordained relationship.

How do Paul's directives strengthen a marriage?

- Husbands and wives should meet each other's sexual needs within their marriage to maintain connection and prevent the sin of adultery.
- Husbands and wives owe sexual relations to each other because they are bound together through marriage. This bond should not include anyone else.
- That a husband and wife belong to each other does not give them a license to be controlling, vindictive, or abusive.
- Married couples should not use their bodies in offensive ways, but should be willing to submit to each other sexually.
- The discipline of prayer is a spiritual reason a husband and wife can deny sexual relations to each other. Note that illness and other medical reasons may also prevent sexual relations between a husband and a wife.

1 CORINTHIANS 7:8-9

How can singleness as an alternative to marriage be satisfying?

- Paul considered himself to be a successful single person, and he wanted to help other single people to be successful and satisfied in their status.

- The Scripture is silent on whether Paul was married at one time and whether he was a widower at the time of this writing.
- Paul recognized singleness to be a "good" thing (v. 8), meaning not everyone would fulfill the requirements of singleness.
- Paul emphasized that marriage was God's way of meeting the sexual needs of people who are single. God has not gifted anyone for sexual immorality.

1 CORINTHIANS 7:10-13

What resolution should couples make and keep for a lasting marriage?

- Men and women who are married should resolve to remain married, not because Paul commanded it, but because the Lord did.
- Unpleasant circumstances may force a husband and wife to divorce; however, Paul provided stipulations for them when they cannot remain married. The couple must remain unmarried or be reconciled to each other.

How does the command to remain married affirm God's design for all marriages?

- The command not to divorce applied to all married couples to whom Paul was speaking, even believers who had unbelieving spouses.
- Leaving a spouse because that person is an unbeliever is not a valid reason to divorce. God's mandate is for couples to remain married.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

Paul responded to specific questions about marriage for a specific group of people during a specific time, but how do Paul's answers translate to today's marriages?

- If you are married, you have the responsibility to care for your spouse and to fulfill all his or her needs and desires.
- We should view being single and being married as gifts from God.
- To avoid frustrating one's natural desire for sex, one should pursue marriage.
- **Personal Challenge:** Your view of marriage and divorce should be the same as God's view: marriage should be embraced as a permanent relationship between a man and a woman. Consider, too, that Christians who are divorced and remarried are not disqualified from receiving the mercy and grace of God. Determine to encourage others no matter what their marital status is.



OBJECT LESSON

A BEACH BALL

Bring a beach ball or other inflatable toy to the group session. Fully inflate the object you have brought. If you have a beach ball, toss it toward the group, asking members to keep it from touching the floor. Ask: *Besides being a toy, what are other uses for inflatable objects such as a beach ball or lifesaver?*

Explain: *Inflatable objects can float, keeping whatever is attached to them from being submerged in water. Therefore, some inflatable objects have the potential to keep a person from drowning, making them lifesaving tools. Paul tossed the Corinthian believers a lifesaver. The marital relationships within the Corinthian church were suffering from the onslaught of sexual immorality and other temptations that were part of the Corinthian culture.*

Ask: *According to Paul, what general principles should be followed to build and maintain a strong marriage?* Explain that Paul focused on the necessity of unity within the church and the Christian family.

Explain: *Simply keeping our marriages afloat isn't enough. Just as a divided church stood as a poor witness before a watching world, marital discord between a Christian husband and wife could taint*



the opinions of potential believers. The unsaved world is watching, and people are looking for a love that fulfills. The love they need is found only in Jesus Christ. When we love others—including our spouses—with a Christlike love, the unsaved world sees and may seek to know Christ for themselves and become part of the family of God.



DIG DEEPER

GOD'S DEFINITION & DESIGN FOR MARRIAGE

Sexual immorality affected people in Paul's day, and the enemy continues to use the same temptations in our day. How can God's people flee sexual immorality? How can marriages be healthy and holy?

One way to help people flee sexual immorality is to understand God's definition and design for marriage. Marriage is sacred. Churches need to disciple couples who are moving closer to the marriage altar. Many couples are more prepared for the wedding day than they are for the marriage relationship. That needs to change.

One way to strengthen marriages and protect couples from the enemy is to stress five practical, redemptive actions.

1. Die daily. In Philippians 2:3, Paul said, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves." As couples die daily, they seek to meet each other's needs. There are certain God-ordained needs that should only be met in the context of marriage.

2. Date weekly. Many dating couples sacrifice personal interests and agendas to enjoy one another. However, when couples say, "I do," the relationship often changes. Dating should never stop in a relationship. God desires for couples to grow closer together, not drift apart. Dating after marriage protects couples from sexual immorality.

3. Discuss monthly. Finances continue to be a source of friction in many marriages. It's imperative for couples to communicate about finances each month. In Mark 10:9, Jesus said, "Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." Couples need to make sure they're on the same page with the monthly budget.

4. Depart quarterly. Investing in marriage is a must. Getting away from the duties and routines of daily life is healthy. A weekend away in a nearby city allows couples to focus on communication, intimacy, and trust. If a couple can't get away for a weekend, a day trip is beneficial. Time together doesn't have to cost lots of money. However, it's an investment that pays significant dividends.

5. Dream annually. Couples need to pull away every year and talk about goals and dreams. Did we do what God wanted last year? What is God calling us to do next year? Many marriages are weak because couples no longer dream. God wants every marriage to exist with vision and purpose.

Every marriage needs guardrails. These five actions honor God and protect relationships. It's possible, by God's strength, to live godly in an ungodly world.

INFLUENCING FOR CHRIST

For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.

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

9:19 Although I am free from all and not anyone's **A slave**, I have made myself a slave to everyone, in order to **B win** more people. **20** To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win Jews; to those **C under the law**, 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 **D 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 **E because of the gospel**, 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 **F prize**. **25** Now everyone who competes exercises self-control in everything. They do it to receive **G a perishable crown**, but we **H an imperishable crown**. **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 I myself will not be disqualified**. **10:31** So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, **J do everything for the glory of God**. **32** **K 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 **L saved**. **11:1** Imitate me, as I also **M imitate Christ**.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** "Servant" (ESV)
- b** "Gain" (KJV). Paul longed to reach more unbelievers, seeing them turn from sin to trust Christ. Jesus is the One who saves.
- c** 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.
- d** Paul referred to those outside of Christ, who lacked a testimony of salvation.
- e** 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.
- f** To win the race or competition. God cares how His people live and serve.
- g** "A prize that will fade away" (NLT); "a crown that withers" (AMP). This crown is temporal and has no eternal value.
- h** 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).
- i** "A castaway" (KJV). The idea is failing to pass the test, unfit, rejected, or worthless.
- j** God's glory is the chief aim of the Christian life.
- k** Believers are to guard against causing others to stumble and see the Christian life as worthless.
- l** Being saved means passing from spiritual death to spiritual life (Eph. 2:5-9).
- m** "Remember and honor me by keeping up the traditions of the faith" (MSG). Christians must set Christlike examples for others to follow (1 Cor. 4:16; 1 Thess. 1:6).

»» 1. WALKING IN THEIR SHOES (1 Cor. 9:19-23)

- Paul explained that he was willing to give up his rights so he could serve others with a view toward sharing the gospel with them.
- Paul's concern was being able to share the gospel without compromising the truth of the gospel.
- Point to 1 Corinthians 10 to discuss the proper use of Christian liberty. Explain that Paul was not advocating making cultural concessions that compromise the gospel.

»» 2. RUNNING IN THE RACE (1 Cor. 9:24-27)

- Paul compared the Christian life to running in a race, pointing out that discipline is required if one does not want to be disqualified.
- Paul had clear purpose in what he was doing.
- Affirm that salvation is secure for genuine believers.

»» 3. FOLLOWING OUR LEADER (1 Cor. 10:31-33; 11:1)

- Paul challenged the Corinthian believers to seek to use their influence to win others to Christ.
- He called on them to follow his example as he followed Christ's example.

»» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

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

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



FOCUS ATTENTION

Who has influenced your life the most? How?

- We can influence others positively, helping others to live with purpose and hope. Or we can influence others negatively, causing people to succumb to unbalanced emotions and behaviors.
- Paul wanted to impact the lives of people in his circle of influence positively without compromising the gospel. His approach included giving up personal rights so He could impact others for Christ.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE 1 CORINTHIANS 9:19-23

What did Paul demonstrate was more important than anything else?

- Paul understood he was free to be and do anything he wanted.
- Throughout Paul's writings, the influence of Jesus' sacrificial death is evident.
- Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross influenced Paul to sacrifice his own time and attention to himself so he could impact others for Christ.

What method did Paul use to influence people?

- Paul wanted people to receive his message, so he became flexible in cultural practices to establish rapport. When he was with the Jews, he observed Mosaic law, and when he was with the Gentiles, he behaved as someone who was not under the law.
- Even those who were weak were important to Paul; he became like them so they would accept him, and he in turn could influence them.

Why was winning people to Christ so important to Paul?

- An obvious reason Paul wanted to reach others for Christ was so they could escape the judgment and wrath of God because of their sins.
- The most important element in Paul's life was the gospel of Christ. He understood its benefits and wanted as many as possible to reap the rewards of receiving it.

1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27

How did Paul demonstrate the importance of reaching his goal of winning people to Christ?

- Paul's attitude was like that of an athlete who runs a race. Athletes need to train and commit themselves to their goals.
- To develop a rapport with others and influence them for Christ also requires strict training and commitment.

What boundaries did Paul establish for himself?

- Like an athlete who runs according to the rules of the race, believers should obey the principles of the gospel.
- Paul wanted to influence people around him but not become like them. He remained committed to honoring God.
- Paul did not want to be disqualified by disobeying God.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:31-33; 11:1

How did Paul move the Corinthians from thinking about themselves to thinking about others?

- Paul used the example of eating meat to instruct on how to influence others. He wanted the Corinthian believers to use their freedom to help people and not hinder them.
- Paul advocated not eating something that may offend someone who has a different understanding about food.

Why did Paul say, "Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ" (11:1)?

- Paul was a well-trained follower of Christ and believed that he lived in complete obedience and reverence to God.
- Paul's model was Christ, who demonstrated how to live without causing others to sin.
- Paul's statement defined the relationship between him and the Corinthians. He had built a relationship of trust with them.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

Paul's overarching purpose was to influence people and win them for Christ. How can we follow Paul's example?

- We should be willing to be flexible for winning others to Christ.
- We should set a boundary to our flexibility so that we do not disobey biblical principles by being drawn into immorality or compromising our witness to the gospel.
- Before we try to influence others, we should train by practicing disciplines like Bible reading and prayer so that we are strong.
- Christian freedom does not mean we can force others to follow our practices.
- **Personal Challenge:** Evaluate your attitude while among unbelievers. Do you seek to develop a rapport, or do you arrogantly avoid being in contact with them? Make a commitment to influence others for Christ.

MODELING CLAY

Distribute modeling clay (or Play-Doh®) to each person as they enter the room. Instruct group members to shape the modeling clay into any object. Call on volunteers to explain what they have made. Ask: *What makes the dough easy to reshape?* Lead the group to discuss the flexibility of the modeling clay. Ask: *What would cause it to be inflexible?* Explain that modeling clay hardens when moisture is removed, because moisture is an essential component of modeling clay.

Paul challenged the Corinthian believers not to be inflexible. He understood that some of the believers had established unbiblical rules and standards that prevented them from making a connection with others. This lack of connection did not result in influencing others for Christ. Ask: *What beliefs and circumstances make us inflexible? Why is it so difficult to give up things that keep us from influencing others?*

Explain that as long as being flexible does not mean we are compromising biblical commands, we should strive, as Paul did, to reach others for Christ. We must set aside prejudices and personal



preferences that could prevent us from influencing others for Christ. So, as we are running toward heaven, we should not merely be observers. Like Paul, we should be participants in the race. We should not allow ourselves to become hardened like modeling clay, but when necessary, we should water ourselves with the Word so that we can remain flexible enough to influence others for Christ.

DIG DEEPER

THE URGENCY OF EVANGELISM

Selected individuals have been given the gift of evangelism, yet the call to evangelism is for every believer. Evangelism isn't the sole responsibility of the "ministry professionals." Every believer lives with influence. Therefore, it's imperative to use that influence for kingdom-related purposes.

Andrew and Philip were called and followed Jesus. Those men used their influence to evangelize one person at a time. As for Andrew, "He first found his own brother Simon and told him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated 'the Christ'), and he brought Simon to Jesus" (John 1:41). As for Philip, he "found Nathanael and told him, 'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the law (and so did the prophets): Jesus the son of Joseph, from Nazareth'" (v. 45).

What might happen if all believers used their influence to evangelize someone for Christ? The results would exceed "all that we ask or think" (Eph 3:20). One need in the disciple-making process is to equip God's people to own the urgency of evangelism.

How can God's people each use their influence to evangelize one person?

1. Identify. The first step is to pray and ask God to lead you to identify one person that needs Jesus. This person may be a family member, friend, neighbor, coworker, or classmate.

2. Invest. The next step is to invest in that person's life. You enjoy lunch or coffee with him or her; you help this person with a special project; or you pursue a common recreational interest together.

3. Intercede. As you relate, you pray for him or her. You want this person to know you care, and you're asking God to open his or her heart to the gospel and spiritual conversations.

4. Invite. At the right moment, you invite this person to a special event, worship service, or Bible study. You make sure this event will build bridges with him or her, not barriers.

5. Introduce. When the time is right, and as the Spirit leads, you introduce that person to Jesus Christ. This is a spiritual goal of the relationship.

6. Instruct. Every local church is responsible to "make disciples" (Matt. 28:19). If he or she comes to Jesus, discipleship isn't optional. It's critical to instruct the new believer in the ways of Christ.

As Paul taught and modeled, God is glorified when His children use their influence to evangelize non-believers with urgency.

ASSURANCE OF THE RESURRECTION

JOHN 20:2-9

^{20:2} So **A** she went running to Simon Peter and to **B** the other disciple, 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 **C** folded up in a separate place by itself. ⁸ The other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, then also went in, saw, and **D** believed. ⁹ For they **E** did not yet understand the Scripture that he must rise from the dead. ...

1 CORINTHIANS 15:20-28

^{15:20} But as it is, Christ has been raised from the dead, the **F** firstfruits of those who have **G** fallen asleep. 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 **H** die, so also in Christ all will be **I** made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ, the firstfruits; afterward, **J** 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 **K** 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.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** Mary Magdalene. She lived in the town of Magdala on the coast of the Sea of Galilee.
- b** 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.
- c** The folding of Jesus’ grave cloths indicates the absence of haste and struggle.
- d** “Without any doubt that Jesus had risen from the dead” (AMP). God’s people are to live “by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). John displayed faith.
- e** “Did not know” (NKJV); “no one yet knew” (MSG)
- f** “That is, the first to be resurrected with an incorruptible, immortal body, foreshadowing the resurrection” (AMP).
- g** Paul referenced believers who are in the grave. Jesus defeated death (John 11:11; 1 Thess. 4:13).
- h** As descendants of Adam, our physical nature will pass away.
- i** 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.
- j** Jesus’ second coming (John 14:1-4; Acts 1:11)
- k** “Puts an end” (NKJV); “Made inoperative” (AMP)

(continued on next page)

²⁷ For God has put everything **u**nder 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 **m**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.

l Jesus will have “walked all over them” (MSG; also see Ps. 8:6).

m “Under his authority” (NLT); “subdued” (KJV); “under God’s rule” (MSG)

“ TALKING POINTS

NOTES

»» 1. BELIEVING IN THE RESURRECTION (John 20:3-9)

- Having seen the empty tomb, Mary Magdalene informed Peter and John that Jesus’ body was missing.
- Peter and John examined the empty tomb and believed even though they did not fully understand what all this meant.

»» 2. MADE ALIVE THROUGH THE RESURRECTION (1 Cor. 15:20-22)

- 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).

»» 3. FUTURE FOUND IN THE RESURRECTION (1 Cor. 15:23-28)

- Paul explained that, in due time, believers would experience resurrection and the eternal reign of Christ.
- Affirm the reality of the resurrection without espousing one particular interpretation of the timing of Christ’s return.

»» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

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

- 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.



FOCUS ATTENTION

Because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Christians have a future that extends throughout eternity. How does the resurrection of Christ impact your daily life?

- To live every day considering the resurrection and eternity, we should make the most of our time, living without fear of death, knowing that we will one day be in heaven with Christ.
- Through today's study, we will recount the resurrection of Christ to gain assurance for this life and the life to come.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE JOHN 20:3-9

What was the reaction of Peter and John to hearing Jesus' tomb was empty?

- Christ died after great suffering. He was flogged, mocked, and nailed to a cross. After death, His body was laid in tomb, but on the third day, He rose from the dead. Mary Magdalene saw the empty tomb and told Peter and John.
- Peter and John hurriedly ran to the tomb, indicating they were filled with anxiety.
- Jesus reportedly was no longer laying in the tomb, but they needed to see for themselves.
- Peter and John may have had questions about what the absence of Jesus' body meant.

What conclusions could Peter and John draw following an examination of the tomb?

- On entering the tomb, the two disciples were clearly looking for the body of Jesus, but they discovered only the grave clothes and linens in which He was wrapped.
- The positioning of the linen cloths held significance, helping Peter and John to draw the conclusion that something unusual had taken place.

What did John finally believe about the disappearance of Jesus' body?

- Based on what he saw, John believed that Jesus was alive.
- John's conclusion was based on what he witnessed in the tomb.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:20-22

How did Paul connect believers to Christ's resurrection?

- Paul wanted to affirm the Corinthian believers' commonly held belief with all Christians. Christians everywhere believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead.
- Wanting to remove all doubt, Paul reemphasized with certainty that Christ had risen from the dead.
- Paul said Jesus was the firstfruits of our resurrection, indicating that He rose first to establish the pattern for death and eternal life.

- Believers will follow Jesus in death but will rise from the dead, just as He did.
- Jesus' death is evidence of our resurrection.

What did Paul mean when he said, "since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man" (v. 21)?

- Adam, as the first man, brought physical death through sin. All people are born into sin and death because of Adam and Eve.
- Through Christ's resurrection, those who believe receive salvation and eternal life. The new life that believers receive is a physical resurrection.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:23-28

How does Paul's view of eternity compare to how most people view eternity?

- Paul looked forward to the time when Christ would bring a complete resolution to earthly sin and present it to God, the Father.
- Christ will take full authority over the evil on the earth, subduing those who rise against Him and those who refuse to accept His gift of eternal life.
- The final enemy that Christ will defeat is death. From that point on, no one will die.
- Everything will be subject to Christ, except God. Rightful authority over everyone and all things belongs to God, so Jesus will subject Himself to His heavenly Father.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

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 those who follow Jesus?

- Jesus' resurrection gives us confidence that He will accomplish all that He promised.
- We can be certain of our own resurrection because Jesus rose from the dead.
- Because of Christ's resurrection, we can look forward to His reign and rule over us.
- Death is not the end of life, but we will live with Christ in heaven for eternity.
- **Personal Challenge:** Reflect on the resurrection and life beyond our earthly existence. How can you demonstrate the assurance that comes through Christ's resurrection this week?



OBJECT LESSON

ENVELOPES WITH “ASSURANCE POLICY” WRITTEN ON THEM

Before the session, write the words “Assurance Policy” on envelopes and bring blank paper to the session. Prepare enough for every group member.

Ask: *How can life insurance benefit individuals? What are the limitations of a life insurance policy?* Emphasize that life insurance doesn't benefit the one who dies; yet, the assurance Jesus provides benefits the one who dies.

Distribute envelopes and blank paper to each group member. Explain that we have assurance for life today and throughout eternity because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus suffered an agonizing death. But more importantly, He did not remain dead. Because of His death, we have a life assurance policy that will never expire. Ask group members to write how they believe they should live because of the resurrection of Jesus. Explain that this is not their right but their responsibility. Ask volunteers to share their list.

The empty tomb was evidence of the resurrection of Jesus. His resurrection should bring us comfort in knowing that when we die,



we will also be raised in bodily form, just as He was. We have this assurance and should keep it in our hearts and minds each day. More importantly, we should share this hope with others.

Ask group members to place their papers inside of the envelope provided and keep it in their Bibles as a reminder of the assurance they have because of the resurrection of Christ.



DIG DEEPER

THE TOMB IS EMPTY

What separates Christianity from other world religions? Paul believed that the resurrection was foundational to the Christian faith. In 1 Corinthians 15:13-14, Paul stated, “If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation is in vain, and so is your faith.” Therefore, the empty tomb in Jerusalem is what makes Christianity distinctive.

In John 20, the biblical text uses three Greek words to explain the word “saw.” English translations fail to convey accurately the meaning and significance of the three Greek words. Mary Magdalene shared details about the empty tomb to Peter and John. The two disciples ran to the tomb. John outran Peter, arriving at the tomb first.

- John stooped to look in. He saw the linen cloths lying there, but he didn't go in (John 20:5). The meaning of the original Greek word is “to observe.” John saw the facts of the empty tomb. However, he failed to connect the prophetic dots.

- Simon Peter came to the tomb. “Then, following him, Simon Peter also came. He entered the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there. The wrapping that had been on his head was not lying with the linen cloths but was folded up in a separate place

by itself” (John 20:6-7). The meaning of this Greek word is “to behold.” Simon Peter studied the evidence of the grave cloths and the empty tomb, and yet, he still didn't fully grasp the significance of Jesus' resurrection.

- John approached the tomb a second time. This time he went inside. John “saw, and believed” (John 20:8), meaning “to perceive.” John saw and believed that the unoccupied grave cloths and tomb meant Jesus was alive. As noted in the Book of Acts, the resurrection changed the apostles' preaching and gave them courage and power.

As Easter approaches, it's not enough for people to observe the facts about the resurrection. People can know about Jesus and still die lost. It's not enough for people to understand details about the resurrection. Salvation requires more than intellectual knowledge. A faith response is to perceive the facts of the resurrection and believe. Believing is turning from sin and trusting Jesus as Savior, Forgiver, and Redeemer.

The resurrection gives people hope. The Holy Spirit convicts people of sin. And the Lord gives people eternal life.

REMEMBERING THE SACRIFICE

For additional commentary,
see the Leader Guide or Adult
Commentary, available for purchase
at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:17-29

¹⁷ Now **a** 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 **b** 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 **c** approved may be recognized among you. ²⁰ When you come together, then, it is **d** not to eat the LORD's Supper. ²¹ For at the meal, each one eats his own supper. So one person is hungry while another gets **e** drunk! 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 **f** For I received from the LORD what I also passed on to you: On the night when he was **g** 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 **h** an unworthy manner will be guilty of sin against the body and blood of the LORD. ²⁸ Let a person **i** examine himself; in this way let him eat the bread and drink from the cup. ²⁹ For **j** whoever eats and drinks without recognizing the body, eats and drinks **k** judgment on himself.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** "In the following directives" (NIV); "this that I declare unto" (KJV)
- b** "Divisiveness, competing with and criticizing each other" (MSG). While believers, they still need to mature in the faith.
- c** "Genuine" (ESV); "have God's approval" (NLT). Many of the Corinthians were faithful in the heat of adversity, gaining God's favor and approval.
- d** 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.
- e** People were drinking in excess, becoming intoxicated. Paul emphasized that some members of the church were not charitable with other believers.
- f** Paul's message came from the Lord. He was teachable and faithful to proclaim God's truth.
- g** Judas betrayed Jesus before His crucifixion (Matt. 26:23-25, 48-50). It's painful to be betrayed by people close to you. Our Savior understands and is able to "sympathize with our weaknesses" (Heb. 4:15).
- h** They had failed to remember the Lord's body and sacrifice. It's possible that people observed the Lord's Supper with unconfessed sin.
- i** Examination should be done before observing the Lord's Supper. The issues at hand are salvation and sanctification.
- j** "Without solemn reverence and heartfelt gratitude for the sacrifice of Christ" (AMP)
- k** "To be confronted by the Master" (MSG). Consequences always follow behavior (Gal. 6:7-8).

» 1. WITH WORSHIP (1 Cor. 11:17-22)

- Paul rebuked the Corinthian believers for discriminating against the poor when observing the Lord's Supper.
- He reminded them that the purpose of the observance was about worship, not about eating.

» 2. WITH REMEMBRANCE (1 Cor. 11:23-26)

- Paul reminded the Corinthian believers that the Lord's Supper is a time to remember the sacrifice of Christ.
- He also explained that the Lord's Supper is a vehicle for proclaiming the gospel.

» 3. WITH EXAMINATION (1 Cor. 11:27-29)

- Paul challenged the Corinthian believers to examine their lives prior to observing the Lord's Supper, looking for contempt they may have had toward other believers.
- Believers who wished to exclude others based on economic or social status or who were present merely for personal honor needed to examine their motives for participating in the observance in the first place.

» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

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

- 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 participate humbly in the observance of the Lord's Supper.



FOCUS ATTENTION

In what ways has the Lord's Supper been especially meaningful to you?

- The Lord's Supper reminds us of the death of Christ and encourages us to look forward to His return. We should participate in awe as we remember the blessings of Christ.
- Paul instructed the Corinthian church on the proper way to observe this sacred church event.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

1 CORINTHIANS 11:17-22

How had divisions impacted the Corinthian worship services?

- Paul's analytical conclusion for what he had heard was that the Corinthian believers were worse for coming together. They did not demonstrate brotherly love toward one another.
- The divisiveness seemed to grow out of the way the Lord's Supper was celebrated.

What changes did the Corinthian church need to make to ensure a proper Lord's Supper?

- Point out that the Corinthian church observed a fellowship meal before the Lord's Supper that was separate from it. This was a common practice during that time.
- Some rich Corinthian believers were greedily eating most of the food, leaving none for those who were poor. If the rich were hungry, Paul implied that they should eat at home.
- The actions of these people indicated a lack of respect not only for God but for His church.

What do these corrections reveal about the nature of the Lord's Supper?

- The Lord's Supper is a time to care for one another. When the Lord's Supper is shared in a spirit of selfishness, it is a farce.
- Believers should approach the Lord's Supper with reverence for God and respect for one another.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-26

How would you summarize Paul's instructions?

- Believers should be mindful that the words Paul spoke in this passage are the words of Jesus. This should provide even more credibility to the correct observance of the Lord's Supper.
- Paul revealed the Lord's Supper as a historical event that was initiated by Jesus. This should authenticate the Lord's Supper as a necessary and important ordinance of the church.

How do you respond when you hear the words in these verses repeated during the Lord's Supper?

- We should honor Jesus in His humanity as the incarnated Son of God and remember how His broken body endured the suffering of the cross.

- Paul repeated the same words for the cup, which represented the blood of Christ. We should remember that Christ shed His blood on the cross.

What does the new covenant of which Paul spoke mean?

- The old covenant consisted of the laws that God gave Moses. These laws defined the relationship between God and His people and helped them to live in righteousness before God.
- The blood of Christ represented the new covenant, which changed the relationship between God and the followers of Christ. Christians are not governed by the written laws of Moses but by laws that are written on the heart (Jer. 31:33).

1 CORINTHIANS 11:27-29

What are the consequences of receiving the Lord's Supper in "an unworthy manner" (v. 27)?

- Paul warned the Corinthians that if they didn't practice the Lord's Supper with reverence, then they were dishonoring Christ.
- They would be guilty of sinning against the body of Christ, mocking what Jesus did and not taking it seriously.

How should Christians prepare to observe the Lord's Supper?

- The reverence believers show during the Lord's Supper has everything to do with their hearts.
- Our sin should drive us to the Lord's Supper and not away from it. Therefore, when we sin we should repentantly approach the Lord's Supper.
- When an offense that results in discord occurs between believers, they should seek forgiveness. Believers should always seek to practice the Lord's Supper in unity with one another.
- After an honest appraisal of our attitudes toward God and fellow believers, Christians should partake of the Lord's Supper in reverential awe.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

How can believers make the Lord's Supper a meaningful experience between them and God?

- The Lord's Supper is a serious and sacred ordinance that Jesus initiated Himself; believers should give their heartfelt focus.
- Recognize that the bread and wine represent the body and blood of Christ.
- **Personal Challenge:** Before every Lord's Supper service, prayerfully prepare your heart to participate. Correct any attitudes of selfishness or discord toward others. During every Lord's Supper service give God your full attention as you honor His Son, Jesus Christ.



OBJECT LESSON

PICTURES OF PAST U.S. PRESIDENTS AND A DEPICTION OF CHRIST

Download pictures of some deceased U.S. presidents and a picture that represents Christ. Display the pictures of the presidents on a wall, but do not display the picture of Christ.

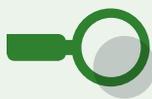
Draw attention to the pictures on the wall and say: *Pictures help us to remember the lives of people. Ask: How do we remember past presidents? How do we remember love ones who have passed on? What's the difference between how we may remember a president versus a loved one? Share that the love we had for deceased loved ones makes our memory of them heartfelt and sincere.*

Display the picture that represents Christ, and ask: *How should we remember Christ? Explain that because of what Christ has done for us, we love Him. He is the Son of God who gave His own life so we would not experience God's judgment for our sins and will spend eternity with God. With this in mind, our remembrance of Christ should be with deep respect and love. One opportunity to remember Christ is during the Lord's Supper service.*

Ask: *What are some indications that we don't revere Christ during*



the Lord's Supper as we should? During the Lord's Supper, some believers eat and drink with hearts that are not focused on Christ. Past presidents don't deserve more reverence than Christ, nor do our loved ones who have passed on. Paul instructed the Corinthians of the serious nature of the Lord's Supper. We should heed his instructions not out of obligation but out of our love for Christ.



DIG DEEPER

A BIBLICAL DEFINITION OF WORSHIP

God seeks worshipers! The first four of the Ten Commandments deal with a believer's relationship with God (Ex. 20:1-11). God alone is to be worshiped and praised. In John 4, Jesus encountered a Samaritan woman. His conversation with her shifted from intimate relationship details to personal spiritual disciplines. In John 4:23-24, Jesus said, "An hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and in truth. Yes, the Father wants such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and in truth."

Defining worship God's way is imperative. Far too many churches are divided over worship styles. God's heart must break over the division He sees among His people. Worship should unify us, not divide. Louie Giglio, in *The Air I Breathe*, defines worship by saying, "Worship is ... our response, both personal and corporate, to God—for who He is and what He has done!"¹

- Worship is obedience.
- Worship is what we do alone and with other people.
- Worship is all about God and His divine activity.
- Worship is expressed by our words and lifestyles.

The Lord's Supper is an inspiring expression of worship. God is worshiped when His people examine their lives, take a piece of bread and a cup of juice, and "proclaim the LORD's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). Therefore, a biblical definition of *worship* is obedience. Isaiah encountered God in a time of loss. He heard God's voice, and Isaiah obeyed God's invitation (Isa. 6:1-8). Isaiah worshiped!

As God's people gather on Sunday mornings, and as they leave church facilities, do they exit the parking lot worshipping? Biblical worship isn't about location, time, or style. It's about obedience. As believers obey God's Word, worship becomes evangelistic. Non-believers see God's people obeying Him. Obedience builds bridges with non-believers, not barriers.

Following the Lord in baptism is worship (Matt. 28:19-20); giving tithes and offerings is worship (2 Cor. 9:7); praising the Lord is worship (Ps. 113:3); sharing Jesus with non-believers is worship (1 Pet. 3:15); and observing the Lord's Supper is worship (1 Cor. 11:17-29).

Taking the Lord's Supper allows God's people to preach a powerful sermon. It's a look back and a look ahead. May the Lord's people never tire of worshipping Him and proclaiming His Word!

1. Louie Giglio, *The Air I Breathe* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2003), 59.

SERVING GOD'S PEOPLE

For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-12,21-26

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

⁵ There are different **b** ministries, but the same LORD. ⁶ And there are different **c** activities, but the same God produces each gift in each person. ⁷ A **d** manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good: ⁸ to one is given a message of **e** wisdom through the Spirit, to another, a message of **f** knowledge by the same Spirit, ⁹ to another, **g** faith by the same Spirit, to another, **h** gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another, the performing of **i** miracles, to another, **j** prophecy, to another, **k** distinguishing between spirits, to another, **l** different kinds of tongues, to another, **m** 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 **n** weaker are **o** 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 **p** no division in the body, but that the members would have the same concern for each other. ²⁶ So if one member suffers, **q** all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** “Special abilities given by the grace and extraordinary power of the Holy Spirit operating in believers” (AMP). Believers need to identify and use their spiritual gifts.
- b** “Service” (NLT, ESV); “administrations” (KJV); “ministries and service” (AMP). God calls and gifts His people for different areas of service.
- c** “Operations” (KJV); “kinds of working” (NIV); “effects” (NASB)
- d** The activity of God is in each believer’s life.
- e** The ability to know and reveal the mind of God (Jas. 1:5).
- f** “Clear understanding” (MSG). This is the gift of having insight from God’s revelation, His Word.
- g** This gift isn’t saving faith; it’s trusting in the Lord and living “by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7).
- h** Power to heal various kinds of infirmities
- i** These are supernatural events beyond human possibility. God gets the glory (Eph. 3:20-21).
- j** “Foretelling the future, speaking a new message from God to the people” (AMP)
- k** The divine ability to discern truth from error.
- l** “To speak in unknown languages” (NLT)
- m** “The ability to interpret what is being said” (NLT)
- n** “Feeble” (KJV). Weakness is strength in God’s eyes (2 Cor. 12:10).
- o** “Necessary” (AMP, KJV, and NASB)
- p** Divisions may include spiritual, doctrinal, and relational strife; tension; and brokenness. God longs for unity, not division (Ps. 133:1).
- q** When one person in the church body hurts or rejoices, the remainder do as well. This is a beautiful picture of fellowship.

»» 1. DIVERSE (1 Cor. 12:4-6)

- Paul declared that the Spirit gives a variety of gifts to be used in the ministry of the church.

»» 2. SPECIFIC (1 Cor. 12:7-10)

- Paul listed nine gifts given to believers. He reiterated that the Holy Spirit gives these gifts at His initiative and in accordance with God's will.

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

- Paul used the analogy of the human body to remind the Corinthian believers that each spiritual gift is important to the church and strategically intentional in its placement.

»» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

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

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



FOCUS ATTENTION

What are some common misunderstandings people have about spiritual gifts?

- Every follower of Christ has received at least one spiritual gift.
- In today's study, we will see how Paul corrected the misunderstanding and misuse of spiritual gifts within the Corinthian church.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-6

Paul continued to correct practices within the Corinthian church that caused divisiveness. What would help a divided church begin to function with unity in service to God?

- To help Corinthian believers correctly appropriate spiritual gifts, he began by instructing them on the variety of gifts.
- Paul said the gifts, the ministries, and the activities for the church are all different.
- Even though the Corinthian believers needed to be unified, they needed to be diverse in the work of the church.

What is the difference between gifts, ministries, and activities?

- Spiritual gifts are the special abilities from the Holy Spirit to each believer. While ministries are the specific offices (such as teacher, pastor, and so on), activities are the works of God through different believers.
- Even though the Spirit pours out His power through different believers in different ways, it is always the same God who does the work.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:7-10

Why would it be important to know that every believer receives a spiritual gift?

- The Holy Spirit manifests the gifts within each believer for ministry. They should not be used to compete against one another.
- The manifestation of the Spirit is for the benefit of the whole church. Each is essential for a healthy church body.

How can believers use the gifts of the Spirit effectively?

- Paul listed some of the specific gifts that are in operation within the church.
- He began with the gift of wisdom, whose recipients will speak the wisdom of God, gleaned from His Word, about a situation. Stephen demonstrated the gift of wisdom in Acts 7.
- The gift of knowledge is the ability to speak about something that has been supernaturally revealed.

- The gifts of faith, healing, and miracles are three different abilities that are used to call on God to override the laws of nature, such as healing the sick or making the lame walk.
- The gift of prophecy is the forth-telling of God in a situation.
- When discernment is used to distinguish between true and false doctrine, the gift of distinguishing between spirits is in operation.
- When used corporately, Paul called for the gift of different kinds of languages and the gift of interpretation of languages to be used together. One person speaks in an unknown language, while the other person interprets the language.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:11-12,21-26

What is the likely result when believers don't use their spiritual gifts?

- Paul used the human body as a metaphor to describe the workings of the spiritual gifts within the church.
- Each part of the body has a specific function to the life of the body, just as each member in the church has a specific function to the life of the church.

How should believers regard the spiritual gifts of one another?

- We should not allow pride to get in the way of allowing others to use their spiritual gifts.
- All spiritual gifts should be recognized for their significance in the church.
- Believers should care for one another because they are all part of the same body.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

God has given spiritual gifts to every believer, and has called us to work together as one body in Christ. What should we say to believers who feel they cannot contribute anything to the church body?

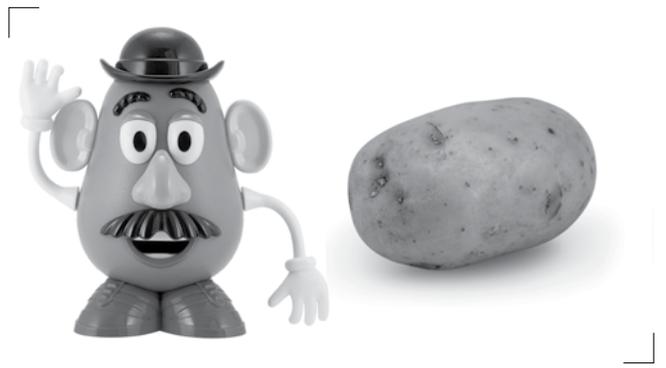
- Every believer has a specific function that is necessary for the function of the whole church.
- Christians are to work together under the authority of Jesus Christ to build up the church.
- **Personal Challenge:** Seek to know and understand your spiritual gift. Prayerfully evaluate whether you are using your spiritual gift in an unselfish manner and to the best of your ability.

A PICTURE OF MR. POTATO HEAD® AND A POTATO

Display the items before the group. Ask group members if anyone owned a Mr. Potato Head as a kid. Lead a brief discussion on ways to play with the toy. Allow group members time to talk about their personal experiences with the toy.

Explain that the individual parts of Mr. Potato Head create the interest and the fun. Some kids interchange the parts. For example, they may put the nose where the eyes should be. Ask: *What would happen if our nose was in the place of our eyes? What would happen if we had no body parts at all?* Hold up the real potato.

Paul used the human body as a metaphor for the church body. This helps us to understand the importance of the proper operation of spiritual gifts within the church. Each part has a specific function, just as each part of Mr. Potato Head has a correct position. When a member of the church body is out of place, tries to do all the work, or does not do any work at all, it can impact the whole church. Ask: *What would happen if no one used their spiritual gifts?* Hold up the real potato again.



Our abilities have been given by God for the support of one another and for building up the body of Christ. Therefore, we should work together under our head, who is Jesus Christ, and we should be willing to use our gifts generously without holding anything back. Let us prayerfully dedicate our gifts to serve God and to serve one another.

DIG DEEPER

DISCOVERING YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS

In 1 Corinthians 12:1, Paul said, “Now concerning spiritual gifts: brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be unaware.” Discovering your spiritual gifts is one component of the disciple-making process.

One of the classic leadership books is *Good to Great* by Jim Collins. Collins conveys that effective leaders get the right people on the bus and sitting in the right seats. Churches can, and should, learn from Collins’ leadership philosophy. Many churches have the right people on the bus but they’re sitting in the wrong seats. Helping God’s people discover their spiritual gifts aids the church in leadership selection and placement, resulting in church health and growth.

God gifts His children for a divine reason. What do believers need to know and do?

- Understand gifts. The Lord gifts His followers as He wills. Spiritual gifts aren’t a mystery.
- Discover gifts. God’s people would do well to take a spiritual gift assessment.*
- Discuss gifts. Talk about ways of encouraging each other. Offer ideas for identifying and using spiritual gifts. Help each other develop skills within their giftedness

- Use gifts. God desires for His children to use their gifts to build His church. If you have a gift to teach, speak God’s Word. If you have a gift to give, practice generosity. If you have a gift to evangelize, share Jesus Christ. The Lord saved you, gifted you, and left you on earth to fulfill a divine mission.

- Celebrate gifts. God’s people need to be encouragers. Celebrate the ministry involvement of other church members.

If believers discover and use their spiritual gifts, then God promises astounding results (Eph. 3:20-21). Churches grow stronger, pastors become healthier, believers discover purpose, and people experience Jesus. Ministry flourishes when the right people are on the bus sitting in the right seats. As Paul said, don’t let your brothers and sisters be uninformed about spiritual gifts.

*An online spiritual gift survey can be found at www.lifeway.com.

UNDERSTANDING LOVE

For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-13

¹ If I speak **a 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**.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** "All the languages of earth and of angels" (NLT)
- b** The absence of love creates a disobedient life.
- c** Christians may use their talents, but it is of no eternal value if love is not present.
- d** "I'm bankrupt without love" (MSG).
- e** "Charity" (KJV). The Greek word is *agape*. It's a benevolent expression of love (John 3:16).
- f** Be considerate, generous, useful, and benevolent toward others.
- g** "Does not brag" (NASB). *Agape* love glorifies God, boasting in Christ, not self (Gal. 6:14).
- h** *Agape* love shows respect for people.
- i** God's plan is for us to die to self (Phil. 2:3-4).
- j** "Not easily angered" (NIV); "not provoked" (NASB)
- k** "Does not take into account a wrong suffered" (NASB); "not ... resentful" (ESV)
- l** *Agape* love does not embrace disobedience.
- m** "Never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance" (NLT).
- n** *Agape* love is possible by God's grace. This kind of love is present in eternity.
- o** Knowledge is limited, so disciple-making is a lifelong process.
- p** Refers to Jesus' second coming. The redeemed will see Jesus face to face in His second coming.
- q** Maturity in Christ changes our beliefs and behaviors. Sanctification is the process of becoming Christlike (Rom. 8:28-29).
- r** Corinth was known for its artful mirrors. Joy will come when we see the Lord "with perfect clarity" (NLT).
- s** *Agape* love transforms lives and follows the greatest commandment (Matt. 22:37-39).

»» 1. NECESSITY OF LOVE (1 Cor. 13:1-3)

- Paul explained that 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.

»» 2. NATURE OF LOVE (1 Cor. 13:4-7)

- Paul presented a series of descriptors to illustrate the nature of the love he was espousing.
- Paul used negative descriptors when discussing the lifestyle being exhibited by the Corinthian believers.
- God is characterized as love and those who follow Him should exhibit that same kind of love.

»» 3. PERMANENCE OF LOVE (1 Cor. 13:8-13)

- Paul contrasted love with other things the Corinthians valued, emphasizing that of all the things valued on earth, only love is eternal.

»» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

Believers add value to the church when they use their God-given spiritual gifts in kingdom work.

- Believers who use their gifts motivated by 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 item.



FOCUS ATTENTION

Every person has basic human needs, including the need to be loved. What words describe love?

- Every believer has received love. It is a wonderful gift from God and helps us to grow in our relationship with Him. But God wants us not only to love Him; He wants us to love one another.
- Paul wanted the Corinthian believers to understand that their spiritual gifts should be used in love.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE 1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-3

How should believers communicate love?

- In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul helped them to understand that love was more powerful than their spiritual gifts. Love is powerful enough to make some things useless when those things are not exercised in love.
- Love should demonstrate God's character in our lives.
- Many in the Corinthian church felt that speaking another language or speaking the language of angels was prestigious, so they desired these gifts above others.
- Paul said a person who speaks a language that is meant to edify the body of Christ is doing nothing but loud talk if that person is not showing love.

How can the ministry of Christians impact the lives of believers? How can it affect unbelievers?

- Paul emphasized that the ability to perform miracles without love meant the act was selfish. If the goal of ministry is to impact others for Christ, then love must be the motivator.
- Believers who exercise faith without love will not care about the people they serve. They will only care about the ministry and their abilities.

How do you think a hungry person would feel if he or she received food but was not shown love?

- Paul instructed that acts such as feeding the poor do not benefit anyone if not done in love.
- Acts of charity define many of the ministries of the church. However, Paul made it clear that love is the most valuable ministry we can extend to others, even apart from doing anything at all.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7

What should people see in believers who demonstrate Christlike love?

- The descriptions Paul used to define love are characteristic of God and those who follow Christ.
- Paul taught that love is patient, which is an enduring quality. God's love endures. Because of our imperfections, we don't

deserve His love, yet He loves us despite of ourselves (see 1 Pet. 3:8-9). In the same way, we should love even when we are hurt.

- Paul taught that love is kind. We demonstrate kindness through simple acts of gentleness, consideration, affection, and benevolence.

What should others not see in believers who demonstrate love?

- Paul said believers who behave badly were not demonstrating love. They should not be jealous, brag, be arrogant, rude, or selfish.
- People who love don't find pleasure in hurt at the expense of others, but they rejoice when others excel. People who love will also choose to believe the best in others.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:8-13

Paul taught that love will outlast every spiritual gift. Based on this, how can believers make love their priority?

- The Corinthian believers put too much emphasis on the spiritual gifts. Paul informed them that such gifts were temporary.
- Paul used a child as an example. He said childish things are good when we are children, but when we are grown up, we don't need childish things. In the same way, spiritual gifts are just for our use and God's glory today.
- Believers will no longer need spiritual gifts when they are face-to-face with Christ. Now we see a dull image of Christ, but one day we will know Him fully.
- Love will outlast every great spiritual pursuit of believers, including faith and hope.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

How can believers grow to love in the way that Paul taught the Corinthian believers?

- Jesus is a perfect example of a life of love. As a human being, He exemplified every positive description of love. Believers should follow Christ's example.
- Love should motivate believers' ministries as they use spiritual gifts to meet needs and share the gospel.
- Believers should make love their priority and goal when engaged in ministry.
- **Personal Challenge:** Reflect on ministry priorities. If showing genuine love is not a motivating factor, commit to let others feel love and see love in you before you minister to them.

OBJECT LESSON

A WORKER'S HAT

Bring a hat that identifies a profession, such as a firefighter's hat, a hard hat, a baseball cap, or a chef's hat. Wear the hat as group members are entering the room. Ask: *What does this hat say about the person who is wearing it?* Explain that people wear hats to identify their profession.

Tell group members that we can know who people are by the hats they wear. Ask: *How can we recognize people who are Christians?* Explain that it is not easy to tell Christians from other people by what they wear. However, Paul taught that it is possible to identify Christians by the way they act. He told the Corinthian believers that the one characteristic that should define believers is love.

Lead group members to describe the actions of a Christian motivated by love. Ask: *What gets in the way of a Christian's ability to love?* Explain that Paul would say selfishness. In our quest to succeed at everything we do, love sometimes takes a backseat. Paul stressed that love should be the focus of everything believers do.

The description he used in 1 Corinthians 13 paints the picture of the person who is just like Christ. When Christ was in a crowd, His



love stood out. People saw that He was different because of the way He related to them. Like Christ, believers should not need a hat, clothing, or a Bible to show who they are. People should recognize believers by their love for God and for one another. This is the lesson that Paul wanted the Corinthian believers to learn and to practice.

DIG DEEPER

LOVE NEVER FAILS

Love is a prominent theme in God's Word. One way to identify an authentic disciple is by love. In John 13:35, Jesus said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." If God's people loved one another with the love of Christ, the world would wake-up and take notice. As of now, many churches lack love and seem irrelevant. Love doesn't mean we ignore sin. One of the most loving things a brother or sister in Christ can do is confront another brother or sister about sinful behaviors.

What does the Bible say about God's love?

- God's love is sacrificial. John 3:16 says, "For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." Romans 5:8 reads, "But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

- God's love is unconditional. In Romans 8:38-39, Paul declared, "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

- God's love is transformational. In Exodus 34:6-7a, Moses revealed, "The LORD is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to

anger and abounding in faithful love and truth, maintaining faithful love to a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, rebellion, and sin." It's impossible to experience God's love and stay the same.

Paul appealed for the Corinthian church to be filled with love. While we frequently hear these words read at weddings, and the biblical principles do apply to marriages, the correct context for Paul's words is the church. Imagine the church's influence and witness if members practiced the attributes Paul listed. Attendance at church business meetings would increase; pride would take a backseat to humility; strained relationships would be reconciled; and the church would have irresistible influence.

Paul said that love "does not keep a record of wrongs" (1 Cor. 13:5). If a church is filled with strife and tension, what's the spiritual remedy? When love is present, forgiveness is extended and received. People outside of Christ may be lost. However, they're not clueless. It's hard, and perhaps impossible, to hide the absence of love and forgiveness.

As the Holy Spirit leads, this is a great time to model love and settle accounts with people. Love and forgiveness among God's family could be a catalyst for a mighty movement of God in our generation. "Love never ends" (1 Cor. 13:8).

ENJOYING GOD'S COMFORT

For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-14

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our LORD Jesus Christ, the **A Father of mercies** and the God of all comfort. ⁴ He comforts us in all our **B affliction**, so that we may be able to **C comfort** those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves **D receive from God**. ⁵ For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so also through Christ our comfort **E overflows**. ⁶ If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation. If we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which **F produces in you** patient endurance of the same sufferings that we suffer. ⁷ And our hope for you is **G 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 **H unaware**, brothers and sisters, of our affliction that took place in Asia. We were completely overwhelmed—beyond our strength—so that **I we even despaired of life itself**. 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 **J 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 **K helping us by your prayers**. 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 **L 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 **M by God's grace**. ¹³ For we are writing nothing to you other than what you can read and also **N 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.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- 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** "Troubles" (NLT, NIV)
- c** God never wastes a hurt. God's comfort, or empathy, leads to ministry involvement.
- d** God doesn't abandon His people (Heb. 13:5-6). His "grace is sufficient" in times of trouble and affliction (2 Cor. 12:9).
- e** This refers to the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit, as Jesus promised (John 14:26).
- f** "Is effective" (NASB). God is at work, growing and maturing us spiritually!
- g** "Confident" (NLT); "unshaken" (ESV); "firmly grounded" (NASB). The solid rock is immovable (Matt. 7:24-27).
- h** Provides a beautiful testimony of biblical fellowship, or sharing life together (Acts 2:42-47; Gal. 6:2). Paul needed the support of God's people.
- i** God's people aren't immune from storms (Mark 4:35-41). Storms develop faith, character, and perseverance.
- j** God is able to save and deliver His people. Other biblical examples include Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Daniel (Dan. 3:17).
- k** 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.
- l** Behavior matters to God.
- m** Grace had equipped Paul to live godly and for the Lord's glory (1 Cor. 10:31; Eph. 5:15-16).
- n** The focus is on knowing and understanding God's revelation.

» 1. COMFORTED (2 Cor. 1:3-7)

- Paul explained that God offers comfort to believers in the midst of difficulties, knowing that God was working for their good, for the expansion of the gospel, and for the benefit of others.
- Paul reminded the Corinthian believers that others were experiencing the same sufferings and were enduring along with them.
- Emphasize that Paul had been delayed in visiting the Corinthian church because of sufferings he faced that benefited them and honored God.

» 2. TESTED (2 Cor. 1:8-11)

- Paul shared that he had been overwhelmed in Asia and faced a sure death because of the gospel.
- He celebrated God's deliverance, expressing confidence in God's ability to do so again.
- Paul also recognized the encouragement he received from the Corinthian believers.
- Paul had passed a test of faith, growing in faith as a result of what he had faced in Asia.

» 3. ACCEPTED (2 Cor. 1:12-14)

- Paul called for the Corinthian believers to accept him as a proven apostle, even though he had been delayed in his visit.
- Note: Highlight actions that point to Paul's integrity.

» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

Believers should base their lives on things that have an eternal duration, with love being one such item.

- Believers can be comforted when facing sufferings because God is present and using those experiences to impact others.
- Believers can celebrate the 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.



FOCUS ATTENTION

To whom do you turn for comfort during times of stress or distress? What object or activity most comforts you?

- Distress reigns supreme in everyday life as people deal with stresses such as the loss of a job, a home, relationships, or loved ones. A source of comfort is necessary for healing to begin.
- Paul's experiences placed him in the category of one who needed comfort. He shared with the Corinthian believers what he had learned, so they could be comforted.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE 2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-7

What value can be found in suffering?

- Paul's second letter to the Corinthian believers begins on a dismal, yet hopeful, note. He had suffered extensively for Christ, and he wanted them to know both the comfort of God during suffering and the value of suffering.
- Paul had experienced the comfort of God from whom he received strength, encouragement, and hope.
- Paul explained that the comfort he received empowered him to comfort those who would face the same or similar traumas.

What hope did Paul offer those who are suffering?

- Paul had been delayed in visiting the Corinthian church because of extensive suffering he was enduring for standing up for Christ in the midst of hostility. But the more Paul suffered, the more comfort he received from God.
- The purpose of Paul's suffering was for the salvation and consolation of the Corinthian believers. Suffering drew Paul closer to God and made him more understanding of others' needs.
- Paul was confident that the Corinthian believers would flourish through their suffering.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:8-11

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

- Paul experienced suffering while in Asia. Though many have speculated about this experience, there are no details on what he endured. The suffering of Paul overwhelmed him to the point that he thought he would die.
- Recounting the power of God to raise the dead, Paul relied on God. He realized there was nothing he could do to help himself.
- Paul had faith that God would not only deliver him from current suffering but from future peril.

How were the Corinthian believers involved in Paul's experience?

- By faith, Paul believed the Corinthian believers were praying for him.
- Paul understood intercessory prayer's value and its potential to place others in the midst of a person's difficult experience.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:12-14

Paul changed the subject and began to defend himself from false accusation. What may Paul have been accused of doing?

- Some may have seen Paul as an unreliable apostle because of his delay in visiting them. He wanted the Corinthian believers to know that his motives were sincere.
- Paul emphasized that he viewed his ministry and life through God's grace, which had been manifested in him. It was in the sincerest of holiness and godliness that he ministered to them.

What did Paul hope to accomplish in his writings?

- With a sincere heart, Paul wrote that he had been straightforward with the Corinthian believers about everything. There were no hidden meanings.
- Paul affirmed his love for the Corinthian believers, wanting them to be as proud of him as he was of them.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

At some time or another, everyone will need comfort due to suffering. What truths can believers draw on while experiencing suffering?

- God's presence in the lives of believers can comfort them during suffering.
- Their comfort can benefit others who are suffering, if believers will share their overcoming their experiences.
- Believers should trust that God will comfort them through both present and future sufferings.
- God strengthens the faith of believers through suffering as they draw close to Him.
- **Personal Challenge:** Resolve to turn to God rather than your own skills and abilities when life gets difficult. Remember that God is faithful and has the power to heal and restore us. He is our source of strength.



OBJECT LESSON

COLORED PAPER AND TAPE

Bring sheets of colored paper and tape to the session for each group member. Inform them that they are going to make a personal fan. Ask them if they recall how to make one from their childhood. Instruct them to make accordion-style folds in the paper, folding it back and forth until the whole sheet is folded. Then tell them to hold the bottom of the fan and provide a piece of tape so they can tape it together.

Demonstrate how to use the paper fan. Ask: *How can a fan be used to bring personal comfort? To comfort others?* Tell them that when it is hot, a fan can bring relief, and if a person is overwhelmed by the heat, another person can use a fan to refresh him or her.

Explain that Paul had suffered to the point that he thought he would die. He had an overwhelming experience with which many of us can identify. Distress and suffering occurs within the lives of all believers. No matter how hard we try, we cannot escape it. As believers, we can turn to God for help or we can try to overcome our suffering by using our own resources. A fan may bring relief from the heat, but only God can provide the relief of hope and



strength during difficult times.

Just as we can use a personal fan to help revive an overheated person, we should use our personal testimonies of God's grace to help others who are suffering.



DIG DEEPER

A THEOLOGICAL CLASSROOM FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

No one is immune from storms. People with a deep love for God face painful and intense trials in life. It's been said that every person falls into one of three categories. (1) You're currently in a storm. (2) You just came through a storm. (3) You're headed into a storm. Storms in life can be physical, relational, financial, vocational, or spiritual. Storms generally surface in life with no warning.

Trials can be fertile soil for spiritual growth if handled God's way. God never wants His people to waste a hurt or trial. Joseph faced hatred from his brothers. God placed Joseph in a place of authority. He had the chance to get even with his brothers. However, Joseph pursued a redemptive path, saying to his brothers, "You planned evil against me; God planned it for good to bring about ... the survival of many people" (Gen. 50:20). Joseph saw God's hand in his suffering.

The Corinthian church was dysfunctional and filled with hurting people. The church needed to know God's nature. In times of trials and storms, God's presence was with them. God's comfort equipped those suffering for ministry. Trials and storms serve as theological classrooms for God's people.

There are several points to internalize from Paul's writing:

- Hardships don't play favorites. You can love God and face storms. Jesus' disciples faced an epic storm one night on the Sea of Galilee (Mark 4:35-41). The disciples realized that Jesus was in the boat with them. That's an amazing lesson to learn. If you're in a storm, whether self-inflicted due to sin or brought on by outside circumstances, Jesus hasn't abandoned you.

- God comforts for a reason. As the disciples lamented their impending deaths, Jesus was in the stern asleep (v. 38). What woke Jesus up? Was it the sound of the waves crashing into the boat? Jesus' eyes opened when He heard the voices of His followers. As you face trials and storms, allow the Lord to hear your voice, asking Him to comfort you.

- People need your empathy. If you've battled cancer, divorce, the death of a child, or an addiction, and you've been touched by God's comfort, other people need to hear your story. Your words have power and relevance. You can speak to others from experience. That's an amazing platform for ministry!

As you face trials and storms, remember that you're in a theological classroom for a divine reason. And always remember, the Lord comforts and uses broken people.

DISPLAYING THE GOSPEL

For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.

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 **A light of the knowledge of God's glory** in the face of Jesus Christ. ⁷ Now we have this **B treasure in clay jars**, so that this **C extraordinary power** may be from God and not from us. ⁸ We are afflicted in every way but not crushed; we are **D perplexed but not in despair**; ⁹ we are **E persecuted but not abandoned**; we are **F 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 **G 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, **H I believed, therefore I spoke**, we also believe, and therefore speak. ¹⁴ For we know that the one who raised the LORD Jesus will also **I raise us with Jesus** and present us with you. ¹⁵ Indeed, everything is for your benefit so that, as **J grace** 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 **K renewed** day by day. ¹⁷ For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable **L 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 **M what is unseen is eternal**.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** True preaching exalts Jesus Christ, "the light of the world" (John 8:12).
- b** 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.
- c** The gospel changes lives. We're called to share the good news and leave the results to God.
- d** Christians may find themselves "unsure of finding a way out" (AMP) but not without hope.
- e** Preaching the cross is costly, but God is faithful. He will never abandon His servants (Heb. 13:5).
- f** The enemy's goal is to "steal and kill and destroy" (John 10:10). Never forget 1 John 4:4.
- g** Jesus called His followers to die to self and live for Him (Luke 9:23; 14:27). This is a daily sacrifice.
- h** Psalm 116:10 flowed from Paul's heart and lips, professing a unity of suffering.
- i** 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.
- j** God's unmerited favor. His grace saves (Eph. 2:8-9), equips (2 Tim. 2:1), and sustains (2 Cor. 12:9).
- k** "God is making new life, not a day goes by without his unfolding grace" (MSG).
- l** "Surpassing all comparisons, a transcendent splendor and an endless blessedness" (AMP). Persecution and suffering are minor compared to the eternal rewards of glory in heaven.
- m** Fix your eyes on Christ (Heb. 12:2), and lay up "treasures in heaven" (Matt. 6:20). For the redeemed, the best is yet to come!

»» 1. PROCLAIM (2 Cor. 4:5-6)

- Paul explained that he did not preach his own message but proclaimed Jesus as the Christ.

»» 2. LIVE (2 Cor. 4:7-15)

- Paul listed situations that highlighted his weakness as a human in contrast with overcoming through God's power as demonstrated through the gospel.
- True life is found through faith in the resurrected Jesus.

»» 3. FOCUS (2 Cor. 4:16-18)

- 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.
- When serving others, the reward should not be the motive; bringing Christ glory should be the motivator.

»» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

Believers can recognize the work of God in and through others, accepting them as co-laborers.

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



FOCUS ATTENTION

Why is a person's attitude important when having a conversation with another person?

- Humility is the proper attitude for believers of Christ. A humble believer depends completely on God through the Holy Spirit for power. We share the gospel to focus on Christ and not to show off our own abilities.
- Paul loved the Corinthian church. He taught them godly principles that would lead them to successfully serve Christ and minister to others.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE 2 CORINTHIANS 4:5-6

Sharing the gospel with power is one of the principles Paul taught. What did he express as the essentials for sharing the gospel?

- Paul did not want to rule over the Corinthian church. He saw himself as a servant of God and the church. Jesus is the One to whom everyone should submit.
- Paul explained that he did not talk about himself when he preached. The gospel message is exclusively about Jesus Christ; therefore Paul focused his message on Christ.
- Paul preached Christ so that unbelievers would submit to Christ and not to him.

What made the difference in Paul's preaching?

- God had changed Paul's heart, filling it with spiritual light so darkness was removed.
- The light is the knowledge of God that comes from knowing Christ. When Paul received salvation on the Damascus Road, he saw God's glory in the face of Christ.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:7-15

The use of paradoxical situations helped Paul to convey the nature of Christ's ministry. What hope do believers have despite human frailties and weaknesses?

- Paul explained that God has placed His knowledge and glory inside of frail human bodies.
- Paul described the bodies of believers as "clay jars," which are not durable and of little value. Paul used this description to contrast our bodies with God's power.
- Four weaknesses of clay jars contrast God's power. Paul said believers are "afflicted in every way," "perplexed," "persecuted," and "struck down," but God's power keeps believers from being "crushed," "in despair," "abandoned," and "destroyed" (vv. 8-9).
- Paul knew the power of God in his life because he lived it. He walked in victory because of the life of Christ ("treasure," v. 7) that was inside of him.

What risks might today's believers need to overcome as they share the gospel of Christ?

- Paul identified with the death of Jesus because of the danger and threats of death he faced daily.
- Though Paul was often under the threat of death by his enemies and from aging, God continued to give him life, just as God resurrected Jesus, so Paul could preach the gospel for Christ.

Why did Paul continue to preach the gospel of Christ despite the dangers?

- Paul put his faith in God and was justified. Therefore, Paul pledged his life to Christ.
- Paul trusted that he would be resurrected after he died and be united with other believers who have been resurrected.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:16-18

How may Paul's sufferings cause some believers to be discouraged?

- The sufferings of Paul did not cause him to become discouraged. He continued to preach the message of Christ even though his body was wearing out.
- Paul believed that the sufferings he endured did not compare to the glory that lay ahead for him.
- Believers were encouraged to focus on the "unseen," which Paul said is "eternal," and not on the "temporary," which is what can be "seen" (v. 18).

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

How can we faithfully proclaim Christ instead of ourselves as we share the gospel?

- When sharing the gospel, believers should speak about Christ so that unbelievers will see Him and not promote themselves.
- Even though the bodies of believers are frail, we should trust the power of Christ that dwells within us.
- Despite facing hardship when sharing the gospel, we must understand that these sufferings do not compare to the glory that is before us.
- Believers should focus on heaven, which is unseen and permanent, rather than their lives on earth.
- **Personal Challenge:** This week write down your personal testimony, and evaluate whether it focuses on Christ or you. Make necessary adjustments, and then prayerfully seek an opportunity to share it.



OBJECT LESSON

A MIRROR

Bring a mirror to the group session. Ask group members to pass the mirror around so that everyone can look at themselves. Ask: *What is the purpose of a mirror?* Share that a mirror allows people to view themselves primarily for grooming. Essentially, the mirror allows people to see what others see.

Ask: *What would you like people to see when you share the gospel?* Explain that Paul said when he preached, he wanted people to see Christ and not him. Paul had committed his life to serving Christ because of the transformation within his heart.

Ask: *How can we reflect Christ when we share the gospel?* Emphasize that we should share what Christ has done in our lives and avoid sharing stories about our own abilities and accomplishments. We can talk about our lives, but always remember the transformation that has taken place within us and give God the credit and glory for the change. Also, we should keep our focus on heaven, which Paul called the “unseen,” and not on earth and the things we see around us, especially when we are faced with problems because of our testimonies. Explain that Paul was able to move past persecutions



for the sake of the gospel, because he recognized this life was not all there was. Even though Paul suffered because of the gospel he preached, he knew that when life was over, he would receive rewards and be with God. The truth that we will live with God in heaven, a place free from pain and suffering, should motivate us to share Christ courageously and boldly.



DIG DEEPER

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

Paul stressed to the Corinthian believers that his life’s mission and purpose was to proclaim the gospel. This wasn’t about Paul. His desire was to exalt Jesus (John 3:30; 12:32). Paul was God’s servant, not a Corinthian celebrity. He talked about God’s grace. There are three aspects to God’s grace that should amaze us. His grace saves us (Eph. 2:8-9), equips us (2 Tim. 2:1), and sustains us (2 Cor. 12:7-10).

What do people need to know about Jesus?

- Jesus left the glories of heaven and came to this earth. Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem reminds us that God is with us (Matt. 1:23).
- Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life (Heb. 4:15). Animals that were sacrificed needed to be blemish and injury free. Jesus lived His life without blemish.
- Jesus sought the Father’s perfect will (Matt. 26:42). Jesus’ life mission was “to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10).
- Jesus died a horrific, sacrificial death on the cross (Luke 23:26-43). Nails pierced Jesus’ hands and feet, a crown of thorns was pressed over His brow, and a spear penetrated His side.
- Jesus was buried in a borrowed tomb (Luke 23:50-56). Guards were placed at the tomb’s entrance, covered with a heavy stone.

- Jesus experienced a magnificent resurrection (John 20:1-10). The empty tomb separates Christianity from other world religions. Jesus is alive!
 - Jesus ascended back to the Father (Acts 1:6-11). Jesus appeared to many people following His resurrection, and He left this earth with a profound promise.
 - Jesus is coming again (John 14:1-6). Jesus’ second coming is about Him ruling and reigning as King of kings and Lord of lords.
 - Jesus calls His followers to die to self and live for His glory (Luke 9:23). It costs people (time, money, focus, and comfort) to follow Jesus. The gospel demands our all.
- As Paul believed and demonstrated, the people of Corinth needed the gospel. People urgently need the gospel today as well.

SESSION 11

BECOMING NEW

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

¹⁶ From now on, then, we do not know anyone from a **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 **B new creation**; the old has passed away, and see, **C the new has come!** ¹⁸ Everything is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the **D ministry of reconciliation**. ¹⁹ That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, **E not counting their trespasses** against them, and he has committed the **F message of reconciliation** to us. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, since **G God is making his appeal through us**. We **H plead** on Christ's behalf: "Be reconciled to God." ²¹ He made **I the one who did not know sin** to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the **J righteousness of God**. ... ^{6:1} **K Working together** with him, we also appeal to you, "Don't receive the grace of God **L 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 **M the acceptable time**; **N now** is the day of salvation!

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** "According to the flesh" (ESV); "human point of view" (NLT)
- b** "Reborn and renewed by the Holy Spirit" (AMP)
- c** A beautiful picture of salvation—knowing Christ isn't self-improvement but spiritual transformation.
- d** "So that by our example we might bring others to Him" (AMP). We serve Christ by sharing the redemptive message of the cross.
- e** God's forgiveness is the act of God showing grace to forget forever and not hold His people accountable for their sins.
- f** Sharing the gospel is commanded, not optional (Matt. 28:19-20). Jesus has called His followers to be His witnesses (Acts 1:8).
- g** "God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them" (MSG).
- h** Our emotions are present in speaking the gospel. We need to extend evangelistic invitations with passion and urgency.
- i** Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life. He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10).
- j** "Made right with God through Christ" (NLT)
- k** One result of salvation is Christian service (Eph. 2:10). God calls and gifts His children for ministry involvement (1 Cor. 12:1).
- l** "By turning away from sound doctrine and His merciful kindness" (AMP). The original Greek word for "vain" means *empty*.
- m** "Time of God's favor" (NIV); "favorable time" (ESV); "the 'right time'" (NLT)
- n** Tomorrow isn't guaranteed (Jas. 4:13-17). Salvation is about spiritual and eternal deliverance.

»» 1. REBORN (2 Cor. 5:16-17)

- Paul described the results of salvation in terms of being made new. This change includes death to the former way of life.
- Interpret Paul's statements in terms of his expressing how salvation changed his view of others and of Jesus.

»» 2. RECONCILED (2 Cor. 5:18-21)

- Paul declared that believers are reconciled, or granted peace with God. God grants this forgiveness through faith in Christ.
- As a result, believers are to call others to accept God's offer of reconciliation through His Son.
- Emphasize that churches that reconcile once-fractured relationships will be more effective in proclaiming the gospel message.

»» 3. READY (2 Cor. 6:1-2)

- Paul reminded his hearers that the time to act on God's offer is when they hear the message.
- Be careful to avoid implying that the Corinthians were in danger of losing their salvation.

»» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

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

- 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.



FOCUS ATTENTION

How does a person's life change because of Jesus?

- Paul instructed the Corinthians about the transformation that takes place inside of a person who has been born again.
- Paul wanted the Corinthian believers to understand that his ministry was Spirit-led, so he guided them through the salvation process.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE 2 CORINTHIANS 5:16-17

Paul explained that we are made different by the Holy Spirit. How should this change cause believers to regard one another?

- Christ died for all people; therefore, they should live for Christ.
- Because believers live in Christ, they should not look at the flesh or the outward appearance of people. He wanted them to look at the heart.
- At one time, Paul viewed Jesus as a mere man of flesh and blood, but now he understood who Jesus was and knew Him to be the Messiah.

How did Paul explain the transformation process that takes place in believers? How would you explain it?

- Anyone who believes in Christ can become a Christian.
- People who trust in Christ are changed on the inside. Paul called them new creations.
- In this transformation, nothing changes on the outside, but our perspectives, deep prejudices, wills, and love of sin are changed. Only God can make this change.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:18-21

What are believers' relationships with God like once they are changed into the new creation?

- God, in Christ, reconciles people in the world back to Him.
- Christians belong to God because of reconciliation. This means the relationship between God and His children has been restored.
- This reconciliation, which is the work of God, included the removal of sins.

What responsibilities has God given every believer who has been reconciled to Him? How can we fulfill that responsibility?

- As people who have been reconciled, believers should reconcile others back to God.
- All believers are Christ's ambassadors who can speak the message of reconciliation on Christ's behalf.

- The message of reconciliation should be a desperate appeal for people to return to God. The message should also include an explanation about the transformation that takes place in the lives and hearts of people.

2 CORINTHIANS 6:1-2

What warning did Paul extend to the Corinthian believers?

- All believers are called to work alongside of Christ.
- Paul made a strong appeal that the Corinthian believers take their position with Christ seriously.
- Paul urged them not to take the grace of God in vain. He urged them to allow Christ to continue working in their hearts and not return to sin.

What time parameters did Paul give the Corinthian believers for doing the work of reconciliation?

- Paul quoted Isaiah 49:8 to enforce that today is the day of salvation. He gave the Corinthian believers a sense of urgency. They were to begin sharing their message of reconciliation immediately.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

What does this text teach us about the change that takes place in believers? What does it say about believers' responsibilities as changed people?

- The Holy Spirit has changed our hearts, giving us new lives and new perspectives of the world. We no longer desire to participate in sinful activities.
- We now live in union with Christ because our relationship with God has been restored.
- When we speak to others about Christ, we are speaking on His behalf as His coworkers.
- The time to share Christ with others is now.
- **Personal Challenge:** This week, take time to people watch. Your transformation and reconciliation should have changed the way you view others. As an ambassador for God and a coworker with Christ, take time to think about what Christ would say to the people around you.



OBJECT LESSON

A POTTED PLANT AND SEEDS

Display a potted plant and a package of seeds to the group. Ask who in the group has a green thumb and loves to garden. Show the seeds and explain that the plant on the table began as a seed. Amazingly all plants, shrubs, and trees begin as seeds, including the giant sequoia trees. The process that takes place in the seed so that it will grow is called germination. Germination is like metamorphosis in that an amazing change takes place. However, germination is different from metamorphosis in that the seed is not a functioning life form. The caterpillar is an insect that changes into a butterfly, which is another insect.

Metamorphosis closely resembles the change that takes place in the heart of a born-again believer. Bible teachers often use the stages of a caterpillar's metamorphosis as a metaphor to teach the spiritual transformation concept. Paul clearly explained this concept for the Corinthian believers.

We learn from Paul's teaching that nothing changes on the outside of people who receive Christ, but we become brand-new people on the inside. It's the work of God through the Holy Spirit that changes



us, and we are no longer the same. The change does not take place in our brains or our bodies, but in our souls, and the change that takes place impacts our whole lives. Spiritual transformation gives us a new purpose for the lives we live on earth and our hope of spending eternity with God.



DIG DEEPER

THE URGENCY OF THE GOSPEL

Paul's instruction to the Corinthians helps put life and ministry in perspective. The urgency of the gospel is at the heart of Paul's appeal. He said, "See, now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). You can interview pastors, and they'll share stories of how uncertain and fragile life is. God's servants often stand behind caskets of children, youth, and adults of all ages. The hour is at hand to sound the gospel alarm.

Paul revealed a spiritual progression to being God's ambassador and involved in a "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18).

- Salvation brings forgiveness. Jesus' death and resurrection leads to spiritual change. Forgiveness is available in Jesus Christ.
- Forgiveness births freedom. Being new in Christ allows people to put down unnecessary baggage and bury the guilt of the past. Jesus sets people free (John 8:32,36).
- Freedom leads to ministry. God saved you and gifted you for a divine purpose. Your freedom in Christ equips you for ministry.
- Ministry demands involvement. God didn't save you to sit in the stands and be a ministry spectator. Your name is on the team roster. God wants you involved in ministry.

• Involvement engages lostness. God's ambassadors' need an awareness and brokenness for people separated from Jesus Christ. As you inventory your family, neighbors, friends, coworkers, and classmates, who is outside of Christ? How are you reaching them?

• Lostness requires urgency. Life is brief. The moment to prepare for eternity is now. God's people need to wake up to the urgency of the gospel.

• Urgency facilitates obedience. God calls His people to be "doers" of His Word (Jas. 1:22). When was the last time you led another person to Christ? When was the last time you tried?

Involvement in the gospel ministry isn't for ministry professionals only. God saved and gifted you for service. He wants you to do the work of evangelism. Certain believers have the gift of evangelism (Eph. 4:11). However, every believer has the responsibility to be an evangelist. You're God's ambassador. Serve Him well!

GIVING FAITHFULLY

For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.

2 CORINTHIANS 9:1-15

¹ Now concerning the **A ministry to the saints**, it is unnecessary for me to write to you. ² For I know your **B eagerness**, and I boast about you to the Macedonians: “Achaia has been ready since last year,” and your **C zeal** has stirred up most of them. ³ But I am sending the brothers so that our **D boasting** 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 **E put to shame** in that situation. ⁵ Therefore I considered it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and **F arrange in advance** 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 **G sows generously will also reap generously**. ⁷ Each person should **H do** as he has decided in his heart — not reluctantly or out of compulsion, since God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And **I God is able** to make every grace overflow to you, so that in every way, always having everything you need, you may **J excel** in every good work. ⁹ As it is written: He distributed freely; he gave to the poor; his righteousness endures forever. ¹⁰ Now **K 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 **L supplying the needs** 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 **M obedient confession** of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** “Ministry of giving for the believers” (NLT)
- b** “To promote the cause” (AMP); “readiness” (ESV, NASB); “the forwardness of your mind” (KJV)
- c** “Enthusiasm” (NIV). Obedience to Christ influences others (Heb. 10:24).
- d** The Corinthian believers were prepared, ready, and eager to obey. Disciple-making was alive and well.
- e** “Humiliated for being so confident” (AMP); “be ashamed in this same confident boasting” (KJV)
- f** Effective ministry demands reliance on the Holy Spirit and seasons of preparation.
- g** 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.
- h** Each person should give “thoughtfully and with purpose” (AMP). Obedience shouldn’t be forced or coerced.
- i** God is able to deliver, rescue, and redeem (Daniel, David, Moses, etc.). He is unlimited (Eph. 3:20-21).
- j** “Abound” (KJV); “have an abundance” (AMP). God promised Joshua that he’d be successful if he obeyed (Josh. 1:8).
- k** God supplies physical and spiritual needs. He doesn’t fail to reward righteousness. Righteousness “shows itself in active goodness, kindness, and love” (AMP).
- l** The offering wasn’t only about money. It was a witness, meeting physical needs and spreading the message about generosity for God’s glory.
- m** Evidence existed of conversion. Faith and works complimented one another (Jas. 2:14-26).

(continued on next page)

¹⁴ And as they **n** pray on your behalf, they will have deep affection for you because of the surpassing **o** grace of God in you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his **p** indescribable gift!

n Intercessory prayer is a powerful ministry (Matt. 21:13; Col. 4:12).

o Grace is God's "undeserved favor, mercy, and blessing" (AMP).

p "Unspeakable" (KJV); "inexpressible" (ESV); "No language can praise it enough!" (MSG).
The gift is salvation in Jesus Christ.

“ TALKING POINTS

» 1. CONFIDENCE EXPRESSED (2 Cor. 9:1-5)

- Paul explained that he sent others ahead to collect a promised offering.
- Paul expressed his confidence in the Corinthians following through on their commitment. The Corinthians had promised to participate in the offering in the past.

» 2. BENEFITS FOUND (2 Cor. 9:6-11)

- Paul highlighted the benefits the Corinthian believers would gain as a result of their giving, pointing to God's provisions for them and the enrichment they would gain from knowing they helped others.
- Emphasize the importance of being motivated by the gospel.

» 3. ADORATION GAINED (2 Cor. 9:12-15)

- Paul reminded the Corinthian believers that God would be glorified and honored, using their gifts to demonstrate His faithfulness.

» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

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

- 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.

NOTES



FOCUS ATTENTION

What's one lesson your parents or grandparents taught you about money?

- All people should develop healthy standards and habits related to their money. This includes saving, spending, paying bills, giving, and tithing.
- In today's study, Paul encouraged the Corinthian believers to give as they did once before.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE 2 CORINTHIANS 9:1-5

What did Paul understand about the Corinthian believers' attitude toward giving? How may this attitude be expressed today?

- Money does not come easily; therefore, many believe they should not give it away.
- Paul had just provided some practical guidelines on giving to the Corinthian church (see 8:11-15). He helped them to understand what to do and what to expect.
- Paul believed the Corinthian believers were willing to give, so he questioned whether he needed to send a reminder.

How might we be held accountable for giving today?

- Though Paul believed the Corinthian believers were willing to give and would willingly bring the money to him, he sent Titus to collect it.
- Paul wanted the Corinthian believers to be seen in a good light, especially since he had boasted about their willingness to give (2 Cor. 8).
- In case some of the Corinthian believers gave grudgingly, Paul wanted the money collected before he arrived to display their generosity.

2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-11

How are giving and financial planning related?

- Paul equated giving to a farmer sowing seeds.
- If a farmer does not plant many seeds, his harvest will be small. But if he plants a lot, he will have a large harvest.
- As believers, we must be wise with our money so that we are able to help others in need.
- Paul taught about the attitude of giving, rather than the amount of money that should be given.

What are the benefits of giving willingly?

- Giving to meet the needs of others reaps benefits for both the receivers and the givers.
- Paul encouraged every believer to give generously.
- Whether giving a large or small gift, it should be motivated by the heart.

- Believers should give because they want to give from a heart of joy and thankfulness and not because of manipulation.
- When believers give, it should not be done reluctantly, thinking we have lost our money.

What blessings might the one giving receive?

- God blesses our giving, but we must be confident that God is able to reward giving through faith.
- Paul called believers not to worry that because of giving there will not be enough to meet their own needs. God blesses the willing actions of faithful hearts.

How does generosity promote further generosity?

- Paul prayed that God would multiply the money the Corinthians gave and increase the results of their ministry.
- One of the reasons God blesses believers is so that believers can bless others, and so on.

2 CORINTHIANS 9:12-15

How does giving reflect God's grace and honor Him?

- Paul said the monetary gifts of the Corinthians would not only meet the needs of the saints, but would cause people to give thanks to God.
- When we give obediently, we cause those we have helped to glorify God in recognition of meeting their needs.
- Oftentimes generous giving prompts others to pray for the giver in response.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

What should be our attitude toward giving? How does our giving impact the needs of people both inside and outside of the church?

- Give from a willing heart, not grudgingly or out of obligation. This will motivate others to give.
- Exercise faith in God by trusting Him to supply your needs.
- Trust that God will bless your giving when you give from a joyful heart.
- Trust that God will be honored and glorified because of your gift.
- **Personal Challenge:** Consider whether you give your tithes and offerings grudgingly or joyfully. Understand that God will bless you based on the attitude of your heart and not on how much you give.



OBJECT LESSON

A PIGGY BANK

Display a piggy bank, or other bank, in front of the group. Ask: *Are you a saver or a spender?* Lead group members to share personal experiences about their money preferences. If you are always putting money in the bank, sticking to a household budget, buying everything on sale, or spending a lot of time planning for the future, then you are exhibiting habits of a saver. But if you never have enough money in the bank, buy what you need or want without any regard for price, order whatever you want in a restaurant, rarely construct your household budget, and believe life is for here and now, then you are a spender.

Share that both a saver and a spender can be givers. Ask: *What are some habits of a generous person?*

Paul taught the Corinthian believers about giving. He encouraged them to give generously without being concerned about having enough money to meet their own needs. He wanted them to demonstrate faith in God. He further said they should give from a joyful heart and not grudgingly.



We should heed Paul's practical advice by always seeking to give. So, the next time a believer is in need and the Lord tugs at the heart concerning that need, we should be a blessing to them. Challenge group members to place coins in the piggy bank every week and once it is full, give it to someone in the church who has financial needs.



DIG DEEPER

SOWING

Farmers know a thing or two about sowing. A bountiful harvest depends on sowing. Many people enjoy fresh vegetables and produce because someone prepared the field, sowed the seed, waited for growth, and gathered the harvest. If you ask farmers, they'll say with conviction that sowing is hard work.

The Bible is filled with references to sowing. Paul taught the Corinthian church about giving. Is the offering a big deal in your church? Many people believe the church is only interested in money. That's simply not true. However, the church can't stay silent about money and stewardship issues. Jesus spoke often about money and its influence on our hearts.

What does the Bible say about sowing?

• Intentional evangelism requires sowing gospel seeds. Why are many churches seeing no one saved? It comes back to the reality of sowing and reaping. The psalmist said, "Those who sow in tears will reap with shouts of joy. Though one goes along weeping, carrying the bag of seed, he will surely come back with shouts of joy, carrying his sheaves" (Ps. 126:5-6).

• Personal consequences result from sowing. Behaviors do have consequences. If a person eats junk food every day for three years, serious health issues will result. If a couple neglects communication and intimacy in marriage, marital drift will happen. If believers refuse to spend time daily with the Lord, their spiritual walks will be lukewarm. Paul said, "Don't be deceived: God is not mocked. For whatever a person sows he will also reap, because the one who sows to his flesh will reap destruction from the flesh, but the one who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit" (Gal. 6:7-8).

• Bible intake is about sowing. Jesus shared a parable about a sower. The sower sowed seeds. Some seeds fell along the path; other seeds fell on rocky ground; many seeds fell among thorns; and other seeds fell on good soil. Seeds that fell on good soil produced a sizable harvest (Matt. 13:23).

• Biblical stewardship is about sowing (2 Cor. 9:6-7). Giving indicates discipleship and spiritual growth. Sowing financial seeds is a blessing, not a burden.

FINDING STRENGTH

For additional commentary,
see the Leader Guide or Adult
Commentary, available for purchase
at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.

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

12:7 Therefore, **A** so that I would not exalt myself, a **B** thorn in the flesh was given to me, a **C** messenger of Satan to **D** torment me so that I would not exalt myself. ⁸ Concerning this, **E** I pleaded with the LORD three times that it would leave me. ⁹ But he said to me, **F** “My grace is sufficient for you, for **G** my power is perfected in weakness.” Therefore, I will most gladly **H** boast 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. **I** For when I am weak, then I am strong.

13:2 I gave a warning when I was present the second time, and now I give a **J** warning 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 **K** proof of Christ speaking in me. He is not **L** weak in dealing with you, but powerful among you. ⁴ For he was **M** 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 **N** in the faith. Examine yourselves. Or do you yourselves not recognize that Jesus Christ is in you? — unless you **O** fail the test. 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 **P** truth.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** “To keep me from becoming conceited” (NIV)
- b** “A handicap to keep me in constant touch with my limitations” (MSG). Identifying the thorn isn’t possible.
- c** “Satan’s angel” (MSG)
- d** The enemy’s goal was to “harass” (ESV) or “get me down” (MSG).
- e** God is approachable.
- f** “My lovingkindness and My mercy are more than enough ... regardless of the situation” (AMP).
- g** “My strength” (KJV). We should be wholeheartedly dependent on God’s grace and power.
- h** God uses people who model humility and forsake pride (Prov. 16:18).
- i** God ways are different and exponentially stronger than humankind’s ways (Isa. 55:8).
- j** Immoral behavior existed in Corinth. Spiritual discipline was a notable conviction of Paul’s ministry. Sin must be dealt with, not ignored.
- k** Many Corinthians demanded proof of Christ’s activity, questioning Paul’s authority and genuineness. Discipline validated Paul’s authority in Christ.
- l** “Ineffective” (AMP). God doesn’t ignore sin (Num. 32:23; 1 Pet. 4:17; Rev. 2:5).
- m** “Humanly weak” (AMP). Jesus willingly sacrificed His life for our sins.
- n** “Living your lives as [committed] believers” (AMP).
- o** 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).
- p** “The gospel—the good news of salvation” (AMP)

» 1. PAUL'S WEAKNESS (2 Cor. 12:7b-10)

- While defending his credentials as an apostle, Paul revealed that he had an ongoing battle with some type of issue.
- God allowed the thorn 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.
- Refrain from making definite assertions as to the thorn.

» 2. CHRIST'S STRENGTH (2 Cor. 13:2-4)

- Paul warned those who doubted his authority that his authority was being demonstrated by the power of the gospel among the Corinthian believers.

» 3. OUR CHOICE (2 Cor. 13:5-8)

- Paul challenged the Corinthian hearers to examine their faith, looking for evidence of their salvation.
- He assured his detractors that he had not failed the test.
- Be careful to encourage people to examine their spiritual lives without casting unnecessary doubts.

» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

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

- 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.



FOCUS ATTENTION

Describe a time when God worked in and through you during a time of weakness.

- God uses times of physical, mental, spiritual, or financial hardship to teach, mold, and use us for His glory.
- Paul encouraged the Corinthian believers to be strong, not in their own strength but in the strength of God.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE 2 CORINTHIANS 12:7b-10

How does God use difficulties for His purposes?

- Paul reluctantly boasted about having a vision in which he was taken up to paradise. Paul's reluctance stemmed from not wanting to focus on himself. He wanted to keep Christ in view.
- Paul's vision was so impressive it could have caused him and others to glory in him.
- Evidently God had allowed Satan to give Paul a thorn in the flesh. The thorn in the flesh kept Paul humble.
- As Paul taught others to pray during times of adversity, so Paul followed his own teaching and fervently prayed three times that God would remove the thorn.

How did the thorn in the flesh impact Paul's life?

- God did not grant Paul's request to remove the thorn from his flesh because God had something else in mind.
- Instead of removing the thorn, God gave Paul His grace. God's grace was the strength Paul would need to bear the thorn.
- Paul accepted God's grace, because it made him dependent on God for strength. This gave Paul great joy because he could rely on God's strength, rather than his own earthly strength, during times of weakness and distress.

2 CORINTHIANS 13:2-4

Paul was preparing to visit Corinth for the third time and warned the Corinthian believers about certain issues before he arrived. Why was Paul's warning so severe?

- Paul stated that he would execute judgment on the Corinthian believers.
- Some in the Corinthian church may not have responded favorably to the teachings of Paul and were continuing in sin.
- Paul strongly said he would discipline or correct them.
- A display of power would correct the erring Corinthians better than the Christlike humility he had previously shown.
- It provided further proof that the power of Christ was at work inside of Paul.

How did Paul defend and promote Christ's power within him? How might we place the focus on Christ in our conversations?

- Paul warned that Christ's power would be evident as he rebuked and corrected the sin in the Corinthian church.
- Paul reminded the Corinthian believers of Christ's crucifixion, stating that Christ became weak so He could be crucified. Therefore, Jesus' weakness was evidence of His strength.
- Paul said that Christ now lives because He is sustained by the power of God.
- Even though Paul appeared weak in his ministry to the Corinthian church, God would supernaturally empower him to discipline the Corinthian believers when he arrived.

2 CORINTHIANS 13:5-8

How did Paul prepare the Corinthian believers for his arrival?

- Paul asked the Corinthians to look within their hearts to examine whether they had really received salvation. He was calling on them to take care of their sin before he arrived.
- Paul strongly wanted the Corinthian believers to be obedient and godly, even though it appeared to them that he was not. He prayed that they would do only what was right.
- It was Paul's desire to promote the truth at the expense of everything else, including his own reputation.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

How can believers develop trust in God's strength during times of weakness?

- Seek God in prayer during times of trouble, and patiently wait for God to answer.
- Accept God's response. If He provides what you have requested, then give God praise. If He does not meet your expectations, then trust in God for strength.
- Remember the strength that Christ exhibited when He allowed Himself to be crucified. He demonstrated power that can correct us when we fail due to weakness.
- **Personal Challenge:** This week, examine yourself to make sure you are walking in faith. Identify your areas of weakness and resolve to trust and rely on the strength of God anytime you are going through adversities. Pray for help in finding contentment within those weaknesses.



OBJECT LESSON

EXERCISE EQUIPMENT

Bring a set of hand weights or other exercise equipment, and display them in front of the group. Encourage group members to share the ways they increase their physical strength. Ask: *Do you know the name of the strongest man who ever lived?*

Share that Canadian Louis Cyr was reported to be the strongest man to ever live. Born in 1863, his strong-man feats included lifting a 534-pound weight with one finger, resisting the pull of four draft horses, and pushing a freight car up an incline, to name a few. When he was 49 years old, Cyr died of chronic kidney disease due to overeating and inactivity.

State that everyone needs to maintain physical strength for good health. Ask: *What type of strength do we need when facing trouble and hardships?*

Explain that Paul experienced a hardship that he called a thorn in the flesh, and he prayed that God would remove it. It evidently caused him distress. God did not remove the thorn; however, God blessed Paul with His grace. God's grace was the strength Paul needed to just trust God. Even though Paul continued to suffer



because of the thorn, he could rely on God's strength—a great source of joy for Paul.

When we trust God's strength despite difficulties such as sicknesses, financial troubles, or family issues, it allows us to continue the work of Christ with power. We may not receive physical strength like that of Louis Cyr, but we will receive God's marvelous strength.



DIG DEEPER

HIS GRACE IS STILL AMAZING!

"Amazing Grace" touches hearts and stirs emotions like no other. Oftentimes, the first note of "Amazing Grace" causes tears to begin flowing for many people. Thank God for a powerful hymn of truth!

One of Paul's favorite subjects was grace. God's marvelous grace changed his life, relationships, career, and eternity. Paul went from being the "worst" of sinners to God's preacher, missionary, author, and church planter (1 Tim. 1:15). Paul made it clear that grace was God's gift (Eph. 4:7). You don't deserve God's grace; you don't earn God's grace; and you can't lose God's grace. God calls you to receive His grace for salvation, ministry, and life.

Paul shared three aspects of God's grace that relate to every believer in Christ.

- God's grace is essential for salvation. Good works, religious duties, or church affiliation don't save people. As Paul stated, "For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift—not from works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). It's imperative that people hear the truth about God's saving grace.

- God's grace is necessary for ministry. Effectiveness in ministry isn't based on personality, charisma, or education. God equips the people He calls by His grace. Paul said to Timothy, "You, therefore,

my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:1). God's grace prepared Paul for kingdom ministry. If a person senses God's call to serve in the nursery, on a church committee, in a teaching position, or in vocational ministry, God's equipping grace is necessary. Grace means that God's servants are dependent on Him.

- God's grace is foundational for survival. God's people aren't immune from trials and adversities. Paul knew tough times firsthand. He suffered for his faith physically, relationally, emotionally, and spiritually. Paul cried out to God, asking for freedom and deliverance from a thorn in his flesh (2 Cor. 12:7-8). God heard the prayer of His servant. However, He answered in a way that magnified His amazing grace. God said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). As believers endure raging personal storms, they need a biblical awareness of God's sustaining grace.

As you teach and preach God's Word, you'll look people in the eyes who are outside of Jesus Christ, who are sensing God's call to service, and who are facing trials. Through it all, God's grace is sufficient.



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3 REASONS WE OBSERVE THE LORD'S SUPPER

by Mike Livingstone



Every year on May 10 my wife and I observe our wedding anniversary. Why? Obviously, because that's the date on which we got married. And yes, because if I didn't remember that date, I'd be in the doghouse. We mark that day to remember a significant past event, but more than that, to celebrate together the lasting relationship that event made possible.

Beyond the fact that Christ commanded it, why do believers observe the Lord's Supper?

1. TO COMMEMORATE

Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:24,25).

He intentionally chose to establish the Lord's Supper during the celebration of the Passover (Matt. 26:17). The Passover was instituted by God to be a memorial of His deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper as a memorial of the deliverance from sin He would give to those who trust in Him (Matt. 26:28).

The bread and the cup remind us of the one time sacrifice Jesus made on the cross. We partake to remember what He did on our behalf.

2. TO ANTICIPATE

With the words, “I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom” (Matt. 26:29), Jesus anticipated a reunion with His disciples in His Father’s kingdom. Likewise, He instructed them to partake the Lord’s Supper in anticipation: “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor. 11:26).

Therefore, we observe the Lord’s Supper in anticipation of Jesus’ return and the end time consummation of His kingdom. We are looking forward to that time when we will celebrate with Him at His great banquet table (see Matt. 22:1-14; Rev. 19:6-9).

3. TO PARTICIPATE

More than a time of passive and individual reflection, to observe the Lord’s Supper is to participate in a congregational act by which we corporately affirm our faith, celebrate the completed work of Christ, focus on our unity, and visibly proclaim to the world that Jesus is the only way of salvation.

In Paul’s discussion of the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 11, he made the point that the way we participate matters. In Corinth, the celebration that was supposed to unify the church actually brought disunity to the church. Paul repeated the phrase “come together” five times in that passage (1 Cor. 11:17-18, 20, 33-34). His intent was for the church to focus on their unity in Christ. By participating together in the Lord’s Supper, we give visible expression that unity.

Further, the Lord’s Supper is an act of proclamation, giving public testimony to the message of the gospel (1 Cor. 11:26). By observing it, we announce to those outside the church that Christ is the only way of salvation.

Lastly, participation involves personal examination. “Let a person examine himself” (1 Cor. 11:28). The call to personal examination before taking the Lord’s Supper is a call to participation.

Why do we observe the Lord’s Supper? We observe to commemorate a past event, to anticipate a future event, and to participate in the celebration of life between the two.

Mike Livingstone is a content editor at LifeWay for Explore the Bible resources.

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*

*Evangelistic emphasis

Paul's Second Missionary Journey



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