

Study Through the Bible

1 Corinthians: Basic Christian Living

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Study Through the Bible

1 Corinthians

Why read this book?

Fights. Rumors. Factions. It's all here in 1 Corinthians. Few other passages of Scripture reveal the humanity of Christians as vividly as this book does. Some other topics include: Dealing with a sex-crazed society. Divorce—when is it justified? When Christians can and cannot sue. Get ready! You're about to encounter God's perspective on some hot topics. And in the process you'll see how the church can impact today's world.

Who wrote this book?

Paul, the apostle.

To whom was it written?

Christians in Corinth, an important commercial city in Greece.

Why was it written?

Two or three years after leaving the church he'd started in Corinth, Paul heard disturbing reports: strife and division were seriously threatening the young church. Some had become spiritually arrogant, leading to further problems such as sexual misconduct, wrongs against other believers, abuse of spiritual gifts, and misunderstanding of basic Christian teachings. Paul wrote seeking to restore balance to the church.

When was it written?

Probably in A.D. 54 to 55.

What to look for in 1 Corinthians:

Paul gave the Corinthians what they needed: straightforward advice. Watch for direct, practical information relevant to Christian living and church relationships. You will also encounter great inspiration in these pages. Much of what the Bible has to say about spiritual gifts is found here. It also offers uplifting words about love (ch. 13) and the resurrection (ch. 15).

From the Quest Study Bible (Zondervan)



Study Through the Bible

1 Corinthians: Basic Christian Living - Study 1

LEADER'S GUIDE

Why Go to Church?

The people of a church make up God's family.

Do you look forward to going to church? Do you have a sense that you are part of something global and much bigger than your own interests? Have you learned to sense God's presence among his people and to understand him better as you relate to others who love him? This study will explore these questions.

Scripture:

1 Corinthians 1-3

Based on:

The Spiritual Life section of the *Woman's Life Bible* (2001, Thomas Nelson, Inc.)



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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

People use many excuses for not going to church, such as not liking the hard seats or the music, or feeling like they don't get anything out of the service. But in 1 Corinthians 3, Paul gives the best reason of all for attending church: "The temple of God is holy, which temple you are" (3:17). What did he mean by that? In the Old Testament, the temple was the most important building in the nation. It was holy, because God's people had built it for him, and they went to worship him there. In the New Testament, God's temple is something altogether different. It's not a building at all. God's temple is the people who belong to him. Thus, when you meet with fellow believers as a church, God is present—in the same special way God inhabited the holy temple of the Old Testament.

In addition, you need others for encouragement and challenge. As Paul said, "As a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (3:10–11). If you're having a tough time at home or work, it helps to be able to talk and pray with a fellow believer. And if a friend in the church is doubting their faith, they may need your wisdom to help sort through their life issues. Together, as God's temple, we are safe. For God promises that "if anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple" (3:17). That's a nice surety in this upside-down world!

Discussion Questions:

- [Q] Do you enjoy going to church? Why or why not?
- [Q] Would you rather spend time with Christians or non-Christians outside of church? Explain why.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Our attitude toward Christ directly affects our attitude toward other Christians.

As Christians, unless the reason we go to church is because we love and embrace Christ rather than because of what we get out of it, we will never be content there. We will always be able to find fault with other Christians, the sermon, the music, the décor, but we can never find fault with Christ. We need to be careful that our focus does not become "all about me."

Finding himself in an elevator with Lee Iacocca, an enthusiastic fan paid a compliment to the Chairman of Chrysler Corporation. "Mr. Iacocca," the man said, "I want to tell you how much I enjoy your television commercials advertising Chrysler."

Iacocca replied, "Sir, I could care less of what you think of my commercials. What I want to know is what kind of car do you drive?"



The bottom line of our ministry is not whether people are responding with positive regard to how we say things. It is whether they are turning to the Christ who summons them as we speak. Are they enjoying the presentation or embracing the Person? (J. R. Love, PreachingToday.com)

[Q] Read 1 Corinthians 1:4–9. Name all the ways in this passage that Paul mentions Jesus Christ as our focus.

[Q] How did Paul feel about other Christians?

Leader's Note: *He thanked God for them because they were recipients of God's grace, just as he was (v. 4).*

[Q] Read 1 Corinthians 1:10–31. What often divides us in our churches?

[Q] What is the solution to divisions, according to this passage?

Leader's Note: *An attitude of humility toward one another.*

Teaching point two: We overcome divisions by seeing Christ and his mission as more important than our preferences.

Harvey MacKay shares the following story in *Swim with the Sharks*:

General William Westmoreland was once reviewing a platoon of paratroopers in Vietnam. As he went down the line, he asked each of them a question: "How do you like jumping, son?"

"Love it, sir!" was the first answer.

"How do you like jumping?" he asked the next.

"The greatest experience in my life, sir!" exclaimed the paratrooper.

"How do you like jumping?" he asked the third.

"I hate it, sir," he replied.

"Then why do you do it?" asked Westmoreland.

"Because I want to be around guys who love to jump."

So should be our attitude concerning those who love Christ and are committed to his mission.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:6–16.

[Q] According to this passage, what do we have in common with other Christians?

[Q] How should this change the way we view each other?

[Q] What should we all keep in mind when we disagree with each other (v. 16)?



Optional Activity

Purpose: *To learn to put others' preferences above our own.*

Activity: *Advise the following people as to how they can put others' preferences above their own.*

- The church is changing the worship format, and Janice doesn't like the change. She's threatening to leave the church unless they change it back to the old way.
- The church has decided to use a training program that the Millers didn't like in their last church. They are speaking loudly against it.
- The new youth pastor has a different philosophy of ministry and some of the students are giving him a hard time by comparing him to the former youth pastor.

Teaching point three: We overcome divisions by realizing our wisdom is limited.

Too often we fight for our rights in our churches, rather than humbly giving others preference. If we are sure we are right about something that is not an essential doctrine from Scripture, we should question our motives. As James says, we should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.

Read 1 Corinthians 3.

- [Q]** What showed Paul that the believers in the Corinthian church weren't as spiritually mature as they thought they were (v. 3)?
- [Q]** How does the foundation affect the rest of the building (v. 11)? How can we make sure we are building on the right foundation?
- [Q]** What kind of "fool" does Paul advise us to become in v. 18?
- [Q]** Which of the following do you think are valid points of disagreement in a church:
 - Styles of worship
 - Building considerations
 - Points of doctrine
 - Interpersonal relationships
 - Other

Why did you choose the one(s) you did? How can we know if we are right about a certain issue or not?



PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Augustine of Hippo wrote:

For if we be harassed by poverty, or saddened by bereavement, or disquieted by bodily pain, or pining in exile, or vexed by any kind of calamity, let good men visit us, men who can not only rejoice with them that rejoice, but also weep with them that weep, and who know how to give profitable counsel and win us to express our feelings in conversation: the effect is that rough things become smooth, heavy burdens are lightened, and difficulties vanquished most wonderfully. (To Proba, Letter CXXX, ccel.org)

This is what the body of Christ should be to each other. As we gather together as the temple of Christ because his Spirit lives in us, we should be looking for ways to ease each other's burdens rather than adding to them.

Action Point: Take a few minutes to think about the reasons you may not like to go to church. Do these reasons matter doctrinally according to Scripture? If so, what can you do to approach those you disagree with in a humble way, knowing that you, too, could be mistaken? If not, what can you do to reconcile with those you are divided from at church over nonessential matters?



Study Through the Bible

1 Corinthians: Basic Christian Living - Study 1

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Why Go to Church?

The people of a church make up God's family.

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People use many excuses for not going to church. But in 1 Corinthians 3, Paul gives the best reason of all for attending church: “The temple of God is holy, which temple you are” (3:17). God’s temple is the people who belong to him. Thus, when you meet with fellow believers as a church, God is present—in the same special way God inhabited the holy temple of the Old Testament.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Our attitude toward Christ directly affects our attitude toward other Christians.

Teaching point two: We overcome divisions by seeing Christ and his mission as more important than our preferences.

Teaching point three: We overcome divisions by realizing our wisdom is limited.

[Q] Which of the following do you think are valid points of disagreement in a church:

- Styles of worship
- Building considerations
- Points of doctrine
- Interpersonal relationships
- Other

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

As we gather together as the temple of Christ because his Spirit lives in us, we should be looking for ways to ease each other’s burdens rather than adding to them.



Study Through the Bible

1 Corinthians: Basic Christian Living - Study 2

LEADER'S GUIDE

Use Your Body to Honor God

You were bought with a price.

A popular phrase is, “It’s my body, I’ll do what I want with it.” But for the Christian, that’s not true. First Corinthians 6 tells us that we have been bought with a price—the very costly price of Christ’s blood. Therefore what we do with our bodies should reflect our love and devotion to him. This study will investigate how to do this.

Scripture:

1 Corinthians 5–6

Based on:

The Marriage section of the *Woman’s Life Bible* (2001, Thomas Nelson, Inc.)



PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

You are a complex being. You are body and soul. One of the heresies that plagued the early church was that mind and spirit were the important parts of a human being. The body was separate and unimportant, so God didn't care what you did with your body. From this viewpoint, it didn't matter what one did regarding sex, since sexual acts were purely physical and therefore unimportant. People express the same opinion today. They say, "If it feels good, do it. It's just physical fun."

Paul says this view is all wrong: "Now the body is ... for the Lord, and the Lord for the body" (6:13). He points out that since you're linked to Christ, what you do about sex becomes terribly important. You don't have the right to give your body first to one person and then to another. Your body already belongs to Christ. His Holy Spirit lives inside your body (6:19). God expects you to enjoy sex, but only according to his design: in the context of marriage.

But appropriate sexual behavior isn't the only issue here. How about appropriate eating, appropriate exercise, appropriate medical care—and using your body to perform actions that please God? Your body belongs to him.

Discussion Questions:

- [Q] In what ways does what you do with your body affect your mind and your spirit?
- [Q] How do Christians justify their sin today? What kind of excuses do you hear?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: The sin I commit in my body affects the whole church.

We tend to think of the sins we commit with our bodies as private, yet such sins have the potential of affecting the whole church. That's obvious to see in situations where church leaders fall. But if we ignore God's prompting in one area of our lives, it's bound to affect the other areas. So if the individual members of a church are arrogant and refuse to confess and renounce their sin, how can God bless and use the church as a whole? We may feel that we are getting away with it for a while, but eventually we'll pay the price.

Read 1 Corinthians 5.

- [Q] Why do you think the Corinthian church not only ignored but was proud of the blatant sin mentioned at the beginning of chapter 5?

Leader's Note: *Evidently they thought they were so spiritual that it didn't matter what they did with their bodies.*



[Q] What do you think Paul meant when he told them to turn this man over to Satan?

Leader's Note: *The Quest Study Bible says, "The abandonment to Satan referred to excommunication, not eternal destruction. Paul recommended excommunication with the aim that the man, desperate not to be shut out of the vital church community, would be shocked back to his senses."*

[Q] How might this man's sin have affected the whole church? How does the yeast example help describe this?

[Q] What is to be the difference in our standard for how we treat the sins of Christians and non-Christians according to verses 9–13?

[Q] What does it mean that we are to judge those inside the church (v. 12)?

Leader's Note: *The Quest Study Bible says, "With discernment the church can respond to the behavior of individuals: Do they need an encouraging word, a gentle reprimand, or a strong rebuke?"*

Teaching point two: The fact that I am harboring sin becomes obvious in the way I treat others.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:1–11. Paul gives a scathing rebuke to Christians about their tendency to bring lawsuits against each other.

Leonard Sweet highlights the importance of valuing our relationships with other people over our rights:

Tom Wiles served a stint as university chaplain at Grand Canyon University in Phoenix, Arizona. A few years ago, he picked me up at the Phoenix airport in his new Ford pickup and whisked me away to keynote a leadership conference at the university. Since I was still mourning the trade-in of my Dodge truck, we immediately bonded, sharing truck stories and laughing at the bumper-sticker truism: "Nothing is more beautiful than a man and his truck."

As I climbed into his 2002 Ranger for the ride back to the airport a day later, I noticed two big scrapes by the passenger door. "What happened here?" I asked.

"My neighbor's basketball post fell and left those dents and white scars," Tom replied with a downcast voice.

"You're kidding! How awful," I commiserated. "This truck is so new I can smell it."

"What's even worse is my neighbor doesn't feel responsible for the damage."

Rising to my newfound friend's defense, I said, "Did you contact your insurance company? How are you going to get him to pay for it?"

"This has been a real spiritual journey for me," Tom replied. "After a lot of soul-searching and discussions with my wife about hiring an attorney, it came down to this: I can either be in the right, or I can be in a relationship with my neighbor. Since my neighbor will probably be with me longer than this truck, I decided that I'd rather be in



a relationship than be right. Besides, trucks are meant to be banged up, so I got mine initiated into the real world a bit earlier than I expected." (Leonard Sweet, *Out of the Question ... Into the Mystery* [Waterbrook Press, 2004], p. 91–92)

- [Q] Why did Paul feel it was so important for Christians to not bring lawsuits against one another?
- [Q] What should our attitude be toward being cheated, according to verse 7?
- [Q] How does the lawsuit issue relate to the rest of the chapter concerning what we do with our bodies?
- [Q] Paul says that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God (v. 9). How should we check our own hearts to make sure we will not be counted among the wicked?

Teaching point three: If I don't master my body, it masters me.

Paul's case is that our bodies are meant for the Lord, not for sin. We must reorient ourselves to this new way of thinking that is to permeate everything we do.

Many people justify their participation in a variety of behaviors by calling them "natural." However, the following quote from M. Scott Peck reveals the flaw in those arguments:

Calling it natural does not mean it is essential or beneficial or unchangeable behavior. It is also natural to defecate in our pants and never brush our teeth. Yet we teach ourselves to do the unnatural until the unnatural itself becomes second nature. Indeed, all self-discipline might be defined as teaching ourselves to do the unnatural. (M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled* [Touchstone, 1998])

Read 1 Corinthians 6:12–20.

- [Q] What does Paul mean when he says everything is permissible but not everything is beneficial?

Leader's Note: *Although Christians have freedom, they need to use their freedom to honor God.*

- [Q] What are some practical ways we can flee sexual immorality today?
- [Q] How can we honor God with our bodies?

Optional Activity

Purpose: *To become aware of how sin masters us.*

Activity: *Break into groups of three or four. Provide each group with a popular magazine that contains many photos. Ask each group to find at least one example of someone who appears to be mastered by their sin. Give each group time to explain why they think this is so. Ask the other groups if they think this group is right in their opinion.*



PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Thomas Costain's book *The Three Edwards* describes the life of Raynald III, a 14th-century duke in what is now Belgium. Grossly overweight, Raynald was commonly called by his Latin nickname, Crassus, which means fat.

After a violent quarrel, Raynald's younger brother Edward led a successful revolt against him. Edward captured Raynald, but did not kill him. Instead, he built a room around Raynald in the Nieuwkerk castle and promised him he could regain his title and property as soon as he was able to leave the room. This would not have been difficult for most people, since the room had several windows and a door of near-normal size—none of which were locked or barred. The problem was Raynald's size. To regain his freedom, he needed to lose weight.

But Edward knew his older brother. Each day he sent a variety of delicious foods into the room. Instead of dieting his way out of prison, Raynald grew fatter. When Duke Edward was accused of cruelty, he had a ready answer: "My brother is not a prisoner. He may leave when he so wills." Raynald stayed in that room for 10 years and wasn't released until after Edward died in battle. By then his health was so ruined that he died within a year—a prisoner of his own appetite. (Rich Doebler, from his sermon series titled "Grace with Its Sleeves Rolled Up," PreachingToday.com)

Action Point: What do you need to change about the way you honor God with your body? Write it down on a sheet of paper, take it home, and put it where you will see it every day. Each time you see it, pray that God will give you the desire to honor him instead of following your own preferences.



Study Through the Bible

1 Corinthians: Basic Christian Living - Study 2

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Use Your Body to Honor God

You were bought with a price.

A popular phrase is, “It’s my body, I’ll do what I want with it.” But for the Christian, that’s not true. First Corinthians 6 tells us that we have been bought with a price—the very costly price of Christ’s blood. Therefore what we do with our bodies should reflect our love and devotion to him. This study will investigate how to do this.

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PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: The sin I commit in my body affects the whole church.

Teaching point two: The fact that I am harboring sin becomes obvious in the way I treat others.

Teaching point three: If I don't master my body, it masters me.

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Study Through the Bible

1 Corinthians: Basic Christian Living - Study 3

LEADER'S GUIDE

See People as Jesus Does

Follow Christ's example in the way he treats others.

All of us are born self-centered, with a bent toward caring most about our own affairs. It literally takes an act of God for most of us to move beyond that and give away our lives for others. Until we let Christ change our priorities, we will be indistinguishable from the rest of the world.

Scripture:

1 Corinthians 8–11:1

Based on:

The Friendship section of the *Woman's Life Bible* (2001, Thomas Nelson, Inc.)



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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

She drops by your home several times a week and wants you to drop everything so you can chat; she's stuck like glue to your side at every church function; she phones you every day at work with a question or concern; she's always down in the dumps. You feel smothered, and no wonder. You feel like disconnecting your phone and moving to a desert island—or strangling her. But that wouldn't be very Christian, would it?

Paul says that no matter what you do (whether it's eating or drinking or befriending someone), you should “do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). In situations of friendship (or anything else for that matter), honoring God with your actions is sometimes tough. The last thing you want to do is smile (and mean it) and take some of your precious time with someone who drives you crazy.

Then Paul hits you with a zinger, the second reason for befriending someone you naturally dislike: “I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved” (10:33). That puts annoying, frustrating people in eternal perspective, doesn't it?

Will you, like Paul, “imitate Christ”?

Discussion Question:

[Q] How do you determine who you spend your time with? Is it according to others' needs or your wants? Which do you think it should be for a Christian? What kind of balance should there be in this?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We should live with concern for those who are weaker than we are.

Read 1 Corinthians 8. This passage makes clear that love trumps knowledge, and that we should put aside our own preferences to help others. Paul concludes the chapter by saying that if meat makes his brother stumble, he'll never eat meat again. In other words, he's willing to make all sorts of sacrifices to help others grow in their faith. He sees that as more important than doing what he wants. Ken Langley tells this story:

After worrying for half an hour that we wouldn't get on an overbooked flight, my wife and I were summoned to the check-in desk. A smiling agent whispered that this was our lucky day. To get us on the plane he was bumping us up to first class. This was the first and only time we've been so pampered on an airplane—good food, hot coffee, plenty of elbowroom.



We played a little game, trying to guess who else didn't belong in first class. One man stuck out. He padded around the cabin in his socks, restlessly sampling magazines, playing with but never actually using the in-flight phones. Twice he sneezed so loudly we thought the oxygen masks would drop down. And when the attendant brought linen tablecloths for our breakfast trays, he tucked his into his collar as a bib.

We see misfits at church, too—people who obviously don't belong, people who embarrass us and cause us to feel superior. The truth is we don't belong there any more than they do. (PreachingToday.com)

[Q] How does knowledge puff up but love build up (v. 1)?

[Q] What is the real issue being addressed in this chapter?

Leader's Note: *That we should care for others more than for our own wants.*

[Q] We don't eat food sacrificed to idols today. What are some similar examples of things we may need to set aside for the sake of someone else?

Teaching point two: Following Christ means giving up our rights.

Read 1 Corinthians 9. Paul states his rights, then makes a case for why he needs to give them up.

Joseph Aldrich gives the following illustration of this in his sermon "How to Be a Redemptive Person":

A couple lives across the street from us. The husband, Phil, travels a lot. He's a sales representative, and he's on the road a lot. So somehow I've ended up being Mr. Fix-It. I've been over there to unplug toilets. Twice I've been over there to fix their garbage disposal unit. I wish they'd get a new one! The last time I was there, it was such a bad deal that I had to take all the molding out around the dishwasher and pull the dishwasher out. I was lying there on my back, all wet, with water and food all over everything.

Right in the middle of it, I started laughing out loud. I just said, "God, you've got an incredible sense of humor, because I'd been praying for opportunities to serve, and you're sure giving them to me. I wish sometimes you'd keep your big fist out of that garbage disposal unit." I knew good and well why it was clogged up. Servants have no rights. (Preaching Today, Tape No. 113)

[Q] According to this passage, what kind of rights are Paul and Barnabas giving up? Why (v. 12)?

[Q] What is Paul's motivation for this kind of self-sacrifice (vv. 24–25)?

[Q] What does he mean when he says he beats his body to make it his slave (v. 27)?

Leader's Note: *Paul is not saying he literally beats his body. He is using an example of an athlete who works out intensely for the purpose of winning.*



[Q] How can we enjoy freedom in Christ and still make ourselves slaves to others?

- Give an example of a healthy way of doing this.
- Give an example of an unhealthy way of doing this.

Optional Activity

Purpose: *To identify healthy and unhealthy ways of being a slave to others.*

Activity: *As a group, decide which of the following are being slaves in the way that Paul recommends and which are simply being abused.*

- *Angela is an introvert and would rather stay home instead of being involved in a small group, but Jill is a new Christian and needs to grow, so Angela joins a small group and takes Jill.*
- *Kurt has never defied his unreasonable father, who has forced him into the family business and continually belittles him. He would like to leave, but feels to be Christlike he should stay and take the abuse.*
- *Joan wanted to help Elise, who has emotional problems, but Elise has completely monopolized Joan's life. She never has time for her own family because Elise constantly demands her attention.*
- *Thomas has a successful business, but on a short-term missions trip to Venezuela felt a love and commitment to the people he met there. He plans to give up his business and relocate as a full-time missionary there.*

Teaching point three: Encourage others to follow you as you follow Christ.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:23–11:1. Most of us are terrified at the thought of telling others to follow us, but the key is telling them to follow us as we follow Christ. If we are wholeheartedly seeking him, the person following us will learn even from our mistakes. As one person put it, "I haven't arrived, but at least I know I'm on the right road."

[Q] How do verses 23 and 24 give us a standard of behavior? Give some practical examples where this might help you make a decision about whether to do something or not.

[Q] What do you think it means to do everything for the glory of God (v. 31)?

[Q] What do you think Paul meant when he said he tried to please everybody in every way (v. 33)?

- He never disagreed with anyone
- He changed his personality to suit whomever he was with
- He put aside his own preferences to do what would help others
- He avoided conflict on non-essentials
- Other



Why did you choose the statement(s) you did? What's wrong with some of the statements?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Dr. Scott Kurtzman, chief of surgery at Waterbury Hospital, was on his way to deliver an 8 a.m. lecture when he witnessed one of the worst crashes in Connecticut history. A dump truck, whose driver had lost control, flipped on its side and skidded into oncoming traffic. The resulting accident involved 20 vehicles; four people died.

Thanks to years of emergency-room experience, Dr. Kurtzman immediately shifted into trauma mode. He worked his way through the mangled mess of people and metal, calling out, "Who needs help?"

After about 90 minutes, when all 16 victims had been triaged and taken to area hospitals, Dr. Kurtzman climbed back into his car, drove to the medical school, and gave his lecture—two hours late.

This was not the first time Dr. Kurtzman has assisted those in need. Over the years, he's stopped at a half-dozen crashes and assisted at three. "A person with my skills simply can't drive by someone who's injured," says Kurtzman. "I refuse to live my life that way." (Hal Carp, *Readers Digest*, August 2006)

This should be the way we as Christians live our lives as well: looking for those who need us, and coming alongside to offer the help that we can.

Action Point: Who is God placing on your heart to reach out to? Decide today what you will do in obedience to that.



Study Through the Bible

1 Corinthians: Basic Christian Living - Study 3

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

See People as Jesus Does

Follow Christ's example in the way he treats others.

All of us are born self-centered, with a bent toward caring most about our own affairs. It literally takes an act of God for most of us to move beyond that and give away our lives for others. Until we let Christ change our priorities, we will be indistinguishable from the rest of the world.

Scripture:

1 Corinthians 8–11:1

Based on:

The Friendship section of the *Woman's Life Bible* (2001, Thomas Nelson, Inc.)



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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Paul says that no matter what you do (whether it's eating or drinking or befriending someone), you should "do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). In situations of friendship (or anything else for that matter), honoring God with your actions is sometimes tough. The last thing you want to do is smile (and mean it) and take some of your precious time with someone who drives you crazy. Then Paul hits you with a zinger: "I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved" (10:33). That puts annoying, frustrating people in eternal perspective, doesn't it?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We should live with concern for those who are weaker than we are.

Teaching point two: Following Christ means giving up our rights.

Teaching point three: Encourage others to follow you as you follow Christ.

[Q] What do you think Paul meant when he said he tried to please everybody in every way (v. 33)?

- He never disagreed with anyone
- He changed his personality to suit whomever he was with
- He put aside his own preferences to do what would help others
- He avoided conflict on non-essentials
- Other

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Christians should look for those who need us, and come alongside to offer the help that we can.



Study Through the Bible

1 Corinthians: Basic Christian Living - Study 4

LEADER'S GUIDE

Find Unity in Diversity

Respect each other's gifts and share each other's joy and pain.

God made each of us different for a reason. Just as an orchestra is enhanced by the various instruments, so the body of Christ forms a melodious whole when it works together as God intended. This study will look at how to serve each other using our spiritual gifts and abilities, and how to share in each other's joy and pain.

Scripture:

1 Corinthians 12:1-27

Based on:

The Work and the Marriage section of the *Woman's Life Bible* (2001, Thomas Nelson, Inc.)



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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

Feeling threatened by someone else's gifts and abilities is normal in the sense that personal shortcomings are routine in a world full of imperfections. But it's not the way God designed Christians to relate to one another in the church.

God created his people to be individuals, not so they could fight and make each other jealous, but so they could benefit from each other's skills and gifts. The Christian church needs all sorts of talents. Paul listed wisdom, knowledge, faith, and power to heal the sick, prophesy, work miracles, speak in languages, and interpret them. His point was not that you should tally up your skills and have contests about who's most important. His point was that you should share these spiritual gifts with each other—because they are all gifts from God.

You should use your gifts for the wellbeing of other people, including your family and coworkers, and to serve God. At the same time you should do all you can to respect and support others' skills as gifts from God.

Discussion Questions:

- [Q] Are you content with how God has gifted you? Why or why not?
- [Q] What gifts do you wish God had given you? Why do you think he did not give you those gifts?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We should gratefully accept and use the gifts God has given us to serve each other.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:1–11. The point Paul was making in this passage is that everyone has different gifts and ministries, but we all have the same Lord. It's the working together of these gifts and abilities that forms the church. None of the gifts are sufficient in themselves.

Peter King gives an example of the kind of teamwork the church needs to note in his article "Center of Attention":

The New England Patriots were a surprising success in the first half of the 2003–04 NFL season. Despite using eight rookies to replace injured veterans, the Patriots led the AFC Eastern division, with a 7–2 record. Part of their success is due to an unselfish mindset adopted by coaches and players alike. The vice president of player personnel, Scott Pioli, displays a sign in his office that summarizes it best. The sign reads, "WE ARE BUILDING A TEAM—NOT COLLECTING TALENT."

The team went on to win Super Bowl XXXVIII and their string of consecutive victories continued into the 2004–2005 season. Before losing on October 31, 2004, they



established an NFL record 21-straight wins, by putting team above talent. (Sports Illustrated, 11-03, page 94)

[Q] How does knowing we have the same Spirit and Lord help us to work together in spite of our differences?

[Q] Why does God give us spiritual gifts (v. 7)?

Leader's Note: *For the common good.*

[Q] How do you think God has gifted you (wisdom, service, knowledge, faith, discernment, etc.)?

Leader's Note: *This passage is not an exhaustive list. Encourage each person to name what he or she is good at, even if it doesn't seem to be listed.*

[Q] Give examples of how you think your spiritual gift can be used for the common good.

[Q] Why is it fruitless to wish for a gift we do not have? What harm can come from that?

Optional Activity

Purpose: *To learn how to use our gifts to serve others.*

Activity: *Ask each person in the group to suggest how they might use their spiritual gift or ability to serve each of the following people. When you are done, discuss how everyone's gifts can work together to help each person.*

- *Karen has just been diagnosed with cancer.*
- *Todd's wife recently left him for another man.*
- *June is a new Christian and is anxious to grow in her faith.*
- *Sam is trying to decide whether to go on the mission field.*

Teaching point two: Just as all the parts of the human body feel one part's joy or pain, we as the church should do so also.

What happens if you accidentally nick your finger with a kitchen knife? Your back stiffens, your voice says "ouch," your eyes water, and your feet head for the medicine cabinet. What happens when you see your son make his first home run? Your legs suddenly put you in a standing position, your voice yells, your hands clap—and maybe your eyes water again. Joy and pain are whole body experiences.

It's supposed to be that way in a church too. In his beautiful metaphor of the body of Christ, Paul talks about how various people make up the feet, hands, eyes, and head. He even talks about the body parts (people) who are least important (12:24). His point is that it takes all these varied people to make up a church. Since they're really one body, if one hurts, the others should say "ouch." If one is honored, they should all be smiling. That's the way a single body works.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12–27.



[Q] Do you have an easier time suffering with those who suffer or rejoicing with those who rejoice? Why?

[Q] Why does failing to suffer or rejoice with a person discourage him or her?

[Q] What causes us to fail to suffer with others?

[Q] What causes us to fail to rejoice with others?

[Q] How do you react emotionally to each of the following?

- A man you never cared for at church was in an automobile accident
- A close friend at church just got a large bonus and raise
- A woman at church is sought out by everyone for her wisdom
- A woman you haven't been close to is diagnosed with multiple sclerosis

Why did you react the way you did? What needs to change so you can learn to suffer with those who suffer and rejoice with those who rejoice?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson share Russ' story of how important the body of Christ is:

It was Christmas morning in 1998. Russ Robinson and his family climbed into their motor home. They were leaving the frigid winter climate of Chicago for the warmth of Phoenix, Arizona. Russ and his wife took turns driving all day and into the night. While cruising along in the darkness of a rural interstate highway, the headlights suddenly revealed a woman, dressed in black, walking in the middle of the road. Russ swerved, but it was too late. The motor home crashed into the woman. Her head hit the windshield. Her body smashed into the right side of the vehicle, tossing her into the ditch.

Later, it was discovered that the woman had been drunk and was attempting to commit suicide. Despite the horrific collision, she survived. Russ was devastated. He pulled off the road, dialed 911, and nearly went into shock. Seconds later, he phoned a friend in his small group. Then his wife called someone in her group. The two groups gathered to pray.

Russ writes: "Their prayer support helped me begin the road to emotional recovery. My community listened during long conversations while I tried to process confusing emotions. When I wrestled with God—seeking to make sense of the experience—people offered reassurance and other help. I needed people to pray with and for me, and I came to know what it was to have someone 'weep with those who weep' (Romans 12:15). I experienced how the body of Christ can extend real, personal hands to someone in pain."



Relating his experience to the vital need for Christian community, Russ continues, "You need to invest in community today, so you can reap the benefits during tomorrow's seasons of deprivation and loss." (*Building a Church of Small Groups*, Zondervan, 2001, p. 39)

Action Point: Take a few minutes to think about how you can be more committed to the body of Christ. What gifts and abilities does God want you to use to serve his body? How can you express concern for others' suffering and participate in their joy? Write down practical ways to do this and share them with the group.



Study Through the Bible

1 Corinthians: Basic Christian Living - Study 4

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Find Unity in Diversity

Respect each other's gifts and share each other's joy and pain.

God made each of us different for a reason. Just as an orchestra is enhanced by all the various instruments, so the body of Christ forms a melodious whole when it works together as God intended. This study will look at how to serve each other using our spiritual gifts and abilities, and how to share in each other's joy and pain.

Scripture:

1 Corinthians 12:1-27

Based on:

The Work and the Marriage section of the *Woman's Life Bible* (2001, Thomas Nelson, Inc.)



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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

You should use your gifts for the wellbeing of other people, including your family and coworkers, and to serve God. At the same time, you should do all you can to respect and support others' skills as gifts from God.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We should gratefully accept and use the gifts God has given us to serve each other.

Teaching point two: Just as all the parts of the human body feel one part's joy or pain, we as the church should do so also.

[Q] How do you react emotionally to each of the following?

- A man you never cared for at church was in an automobile accident
- A close friend at church just got a large bonus and raise
- A woman at church is sought out by everyone for her wisdom
- A woman you haven't been close to is diagnosed with multiple sclerosis

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

The Christian life involves using our gifts to serve each other and taking the time and effort to feel each other's joys and pains.



Study Through the Bible

1 Corinthians: Basic Christian Living - Study 5

LEADER'S GUIDE

Love One Another

What does it look like to be devoted to each other?

If you want the best definition of love, study 1 Corinthians 13. Although this standard for love seems overwhelming at times, we also have the Holy Spirit to help us implement it in our lives. Use this study to challenge your idea of love.

Scripture:

1 Corinthians 13

Based on:

The Single Life and Friendship section of the *Woman's Life Bible* (2001, Thomas Nelson, Inc.)



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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

How can you tell if someone is a good friend? You know that person is always there for you and loves you no matter what. This is the kind of friend who helps when you are sick, listens when you are heartbroken, prays with you, gives gentle advice when you ask for it, and kindly points out when you are wrong.

Now that's a friend to be trusted—the kind of friend Paul talks about in these verses. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4–7.

Discussion Questions:

- [Q] Have you ever had the kind of friend (or friends) mentioned in this description?
- [Q] Have you been that kind of friend to someone else?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: How we love is more important than our gifts and abilities.

Love as a ticklish, cushy feeling is vastly overrated. Tucked between two chapters on spiritual gifts is a description of real love. Paul interrupted himself with the words, “Earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way” (12:31). Then he explained how love is more than a feeling; he spoke of what love does and doesn't do, what it endures, how it lasts.

Look again at 1 Corinthians 13:1–7.

- [Q] What does this passage have to do with how we use our spiritual gifts and abilities?
- [Q] What might be our motivation to use our gifts, if not love?
- [Q] How does love become a test of how we are doing in our Christian life?
- [Q] List the things mentioned in verses 4–7 that define love. How is this different from how our culture defines love?
- [Q] What should this kind of love look like in your marriage? Family? Church?

Optional Activity

Purpose: To test how we love.



Activity: Ask each person in the group to silently substitute their name for the word love in 1 Corinthians 13:4–7. After a few minutes, ask them how they felt they measured up.

Teaching point two: We will fail in loving perfectly, but it's still our goal and standard.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:8–13. After giving an almost impossible standard for love, Paul gives us perspective. Relationships are messy, and we are going to fail. We are going to question why God places us in some relationships, and we are going to want to run at times. Paul openly admits that we will be disappointed in ourselves and in others when he talks about how we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror. But he still clings to love as the answer on Earth, while we wait for the perfect—when we see Christ face to face.

[Q] Paul says love never fails (v. 8), but he openly admits we are imperfect in verse 10. What do you think he wanted us to understand?

Leader's Note: *God is love and his perfect love is the standard we go by. It never fails. However, we are imperfect humans, and will never be able to love perfectly.*

[Q] Does being imperfect get us off the hook for showing the kind of love described in verses 4–7? Why or why not?

[Q] How do we allow God to do what we cannot in our lives?

Leader's Note: *Pray for his love to flow through us when ours is gone.*

[Q] How can we put childish things behind us in the way we love (v. 11)?

[Q] What comfort and help is there in knowing that God knows us fully (v. 12)?

[Q] Why do you think Paul mentioned faith and hope in his discussion about love (v. 13)? What do faith and hope have to do with how we love?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Ask each person in the group to choose which of the following they would most like Christ to change about them:

- Impatience
- Unkindness
- Envy
- Boastfulness and pride
- Rudeness
- Self-seeking



- Easily angered
- Keeps record of wrongs
- Delights in evil
- Fails to protect
- Fails to trust
- Fails to hope
- Fails to persevere

Action Point: Tell the group which one you chose. Ask the group to pray for you regularly about this. Encourage group members to ask each other how they are doing in those areas as they see each other throughout the week.



Study Through the Bible

1 Corinthians: Basic Christian Living - Study 5

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Love One Another

What does it look like to be devoted to each other?

If you want the best definition of love, study 1 Corinthians 13. Although this standard for love seems overwhelming at times, we also have the Holy Spirit to help us implement it in our lives. Use this study to challenge your idea of love.

Scripture:

1 Corinthians 13

Based on:

The Single Life and Friendship section of the *Woman's Life Bible* (2001, Thomas Nelson, Inc.)



PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

How can you tell if someone is a good friend? You know that person is always there for you and loves you no matter what. This is the kind of friend who helps when you are sick, listens when you are heartbroken, prays with you, gives gentle advice when you ask for it, and kindly points out when you are wrong.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: How we love is more important than our gifts and abilities.

Teaching point two: We will fail in loving perfectly, but it's still our goal and standard.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Choose which of the following you would most like Christ to change about you:

- Impatience
- Unkindness
- Envy
- Boastfulness and pride
- Rudeness
- Self-seeking
- Easily angered
- Keeps record of wrongs
- Delights in evil
- Fails to protect
- Fails to trust
- Fails to hope
- Fails to persevere



Study Through the Bible

1 Corinthians: Basic Christian Living - Study 6

LEADER'S GUIDE

Serve and Worship Together

Use your gifts and talents to demonstrate God's work in your life.

God made you unique. He will use that uniqueness to reveal himself to others if you let him. This study will examine how to make God known through serving others and worshiping him in an honorable way.

Scripture:

1 Corinthians 14

Based on:

Based The Spiritual Life section of the *Woman's Life Bible* (2001, Thomas Nelson, Inc.)



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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

Take stock of your skills. Are you good at baking? Are you a great typist? Maybe accounting is your forte. How about gardening, listening to someone's emotional needs, understanding Scripture, lovingly caring for children, talking with the elderly, or reading aloud? Chances are you could use one of these skills for the wellbeing of someone else, and in the process point that person toward Jesus Christ.

Discussion Questions:

- [Q] What are you good at? How might God use that to point others toward him?
- [Q] How could the church, using their gifts together as a whole, draw people to Christ?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: God gives us gifts to serve his people.

It seems that the Christians at Corinth appreciated their own skills and gifts—but they were tempted to showcase some gifts as more important than others. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul talks especially about the spiritual gifts of prophesying and speaking unknown languages, both regarded as spectacular gifts from God. Slowly, carefully, Paul continued the theme present throughout the book: How can you use your skills for the good of the whole church (14:12)? Then he added another note: How can you use your skills in a way that invites others to know Jesus Christ (14:16)?

Every skill or ability you have (whether or not it rates as a “spiritual gift”) comes as a present from God. You can thank him for it—and use it for his glory. Read 1 Corinthians 14:1–25.

The *Quest Study Bible* says, “Predicting the future is only a small part of prophecy in the Bible. Like Old Testament prophecy, New Testament prophecy was intended to challenge and strengthen the church. People see various expressions of prophecy in preaching, teaching, and spontaneous exhortations, among others.”

- [Q] Why is prophecy so important (v. 3, 24–25)?
- [Q] What is required for speaking in tongues to be effective for the church (v. 5, 13)?
Leader's Note: *An interpretation so that the church can understand what is being said.*
- [Q] What is the problem with speaking in tongues in church without an interpretation (v. 23)?



- [Q] What is the main point of spiritual gifts (v. 12)?
- [Q] What does verse 15 tell us about pure emotionalism in our worship that doesn't require clear thinking?

Teaching point two: Order is necessary for corporate worship.

Read 1 Corinthians 14:26–40. Paul is establishing order in this passage, so the section concerning women needs to be kept in that context. There are many different ideas about what Paul was trying to accomplish with this instruction concerning women.

The *Quest Study Bible* says:

Some believe this passage affirms a God-ordained order that is to be the basis for administration and authority. In this view, gender-based role distinctions in the church are consistent with Paul's command that wives submit to their husbands in the home (Eph. 5:22) and in the church (v. 34; 1 Tim. 2:11–12) regardless of one's particular culture. Others think Paul was being sensitive to the social order in Corinth. Still others have suggested that Paul was trying to curtail the disruptive practices of particular individuals, not forbidding women from speaking altogether (see 1 Cor. 11:5). And a few have speculated that Paul is quoting one of several Corinthian slogans with which he disagreed (for example, see 1 Cor. 5:12). In any case, Paul is clearly forbidding the disorderly speaking indicated in these verses.

- [Q] What kind of order is Paul trying to establish in this passage?
- [Q] What kind of problems with disorder do you think this church might have been experiencing (v. 31)?
- [Q] How might some of the women in this church have added to that disorder?
- [Q] Since this is a passage about order in a worship service rather than about women's roles, what are some dangers of deciding on women's roles based on this passage?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Once again, Paul gives us guidelines for living. He emphasizes the importance of using the gifts God has given us to serve and build up one another. He also wants to help us establish orderly worship services that will be welcoming to those who don't yet know Christ. Implied, too, in this chapter is the importance of teaching the truth to the church.

Theologian and pastor John Stott says of 1 Corinthians 14:

The most important gift today, measured by Paul's principle that we should excel in those that build up the church, is teaching. Nothing builds up the church like the truth, and we desperately need more Christian teachers all over the world. ("CT Classic: Basic Stott," interview by Roy McCloughry, CHRISTIANITY TODAY, 1-8-96)



Action Point: Consider how you can value the Word of God in your individual life and in your corporate life. Share with the group how you might demonstrate the truth of God's Word by using the gifts and abilities he has given you.

Optional Activity

Purpose: *To consider how we can use our gifts and abilities to demonstrate the truth of God's Word.*

Activity: *Act out a gift or ability that you think God has given you. After the group has guessed what it is, brainstorm as a group how God might use that gift or ability to demonstrate the truth of his Word.*



Study Through the Bible

1 Corinthians: Basic Christian Living - Study 6

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Serve and Worship Together

Use your gifts and talents to demonstrate God's work in your life.

God made you unique. He will use that uniqueness to reveal himself to others if you let him. This study will examine how to make God known through serving others and worshiping him in an honorable way.

Scripture:

1 Corinthians 14

Based on:

Based The Spiritual Life section of the *Woman's Life Bible* (2001, Thomas Nelson, Inc.)



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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Take stock of your skills. Are you good at baking? Are you a great typist? Maybe accounting is your forte. How about gardening, listening to someone's emotional needs, understanding Scripture, lovingly caring for children, talking with the elderly, or reading aloud? Chances are you could use one of these skills for the wellbeing of someone else, and in the process point that person toward Jesus Christ.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: God gives us gifts to serve his people.

Teaching point two: Order is necessary for corporate worship.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Once again, Paul gives us guidelines for living. He emphasizes the importance of using the gifts God has given us to serve and build up one another. He also wants to help us establish orderly worship services that will be welcoming to those who don't yet know Christ. Implied, too, in this chapter is the importance of teaching the truth to the church.



Study Through the Bible

1 Corinthians: Basic Christian Living - Study 7

LEADER'S GUIDE

The Last Enemy Destroyed

The risen Christ is our only hope in this life and the next.

All of us dread the process of growing old and dying. But Paul assures us that the resurrection of Christ has removed the sting of death. We not only have the fear removed; we have a joy set before us that is worth whatever we have to face in this life.

Scripture:

1 Corinthians 15

Based on:

The Parenting/Family section of the *Woman's Life Bible* (2001, Thomas Nelson, Inc.)



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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

Growing old can be frightening. Arthritis eats at your joints. Teeth go bad. You can't hear or see as well as you used to. Mysterious pains play hide-and-seek throughout your frame. Even your mind gets foggy—and at the most embarrassing moments. You look in the mirror and think, *Who is that old person looking back at me?* A trip to the grocery store becomes an expedition requiring most of your energy for the day. Yet you remember when groceries were something you took care of between one kid's baseball practice and the other's trumpet lesson. Worst of all, you know your physical problems will get worse before they get better.

Because of this dismal picture, 1 Corinthians 15 offers a triumphant picture of victory over death. "Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (15:20). Paul described the hope of healthy new bodies, fit for eternity with Jesus.

Discussion Questions:

- [Q] What frightens you most about growing old?
- [Q] How does Christ's resurrection put this into perspective?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Christ's resurrection is foundational to our faith.

Ben Patterson tells a wonderful, true story of a people understanding Christ's resurrection for the first time:

Imagine the mystery and delight of not just hearing, but seeing the story of Jesus for the first time, almost as an eyewitness.

That's what happened to a tribe in the jungles of East Asia, when missionaries showed them the Jesus film. Not only had these people never heard of Jesus, they had never seen a motion picture. Then, all at once, on one unforgettable evening, they saw it all—the gospel in their own language, visible and real.

Imagine again how it felt to see this good man Jesus, who healed the sick and was adored by children, held without trial and beaten by jeering soldiers. As they watched this, the people came unglued. They stood up and began to shout at the cruel men on the screen, demanding that this outrage stop.

When nothing happened, they attacked the missionary running the projector. Perhaps he was responsible for this injustice! He was forced to stop the film and explain that the story wasn't over yet, that there was more. So they settled back onto the ground, holding their emotions in tenuous check.



Then came the crucifixion. Again, the people could not hold back. They began to weep and wail with such loud grief that once again the film had to be stopped. The missionary again tried to calm them, explaining that the story still wasn't over, that there was more. So they composed themselves and sat down to see what happened next.

Then came the resurrection. Pandemonium broke out this time, but for a different reason. The gathering had spontaneously erupted into a party. The noise now was of jubilation, and it was deafening. The people were dancing and slapping each other on the back. Christ is risen, indeed!

Again the missionary had to shut off the projector. But this time he didn't tell them to calm down and wait for what was next. All that was supposed to happen—in the story and in their lives—was happening. ("Resurrection and Pandemonium," LeadershipJournal.net, 4-13-04)

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1–11.

- [Q]** Why have we believed in vain (v. 2) if we do not accept the things Paul discusses in this passage?
- [Q]** What are the main components in the gospel according to this passage (vv. 3–4)?
- [Q]** What overwhelming evidence for Christ's resurrection is given in verse 6?
- [Q]** How does Paul maintain his humility and authority at the same time (vv. 9–11)? What can we learn and apply from his example?

Leader's Note: *All we are is because of Christ's grace in our lives. But because of his power and work in our lives, our message has authority.*

Teaching point two: Christ's resurrection gives us hope for our own resurrection.

Randy Alcorn shares this interesting observation:

The sense that we will live forever somewhere has shaped every civilization in human history. Australian aborigines pictured Heaven as a distant island beyond the western horizon. The early Finns thought it was a distant island in the far away east. Mexicans, Peruvians, and Polynesians believed that they went to the sun or the moon after death. Native Americans believed that, in the afterlife, their spirits would hunt the spirits of buffalo.

The Gilgamesh epic, an ancient Babylonian legend, refers to a resting place of heroes and hints at a tree of life. In the pyramids of Egypt, the embalmed bodies had maps placed beside them as guides to the future world. The Romans believed that the righteous would picnic in the Elysian Fields, while their horses grazed nearby. Seneca, the Roman philosopher, said, "The day thou fearest as the last is the birthday of eternity."



Although these depictions of the afterlife differ, the unifying testimony of the human heart throughout history is belief in life after death. Anthropological evidence suggests that every culture has a God-given, innate sense of the eternal—that this world is not all there is. (*Heaven*, Tyndale, 2004)

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12–34.

[Q] Why would we still be in our sins if Christ had not been raised from the dead (v. 17)?

Leader's Note: *If we deny the truth of the resurrection, we also deny the truth of the crucifixion. We can't have one without the other.*

[Q] Why is our hope for the next life so important (v. 19)?

Leader's Note: *This life is brief and full of pain. The next life is what we are being prepared for.*

[Q] What does the fact that Christ will destroy death mean for how you live your life (v. 26)?

[Q] What does Paul mean when he refers to being baptized for the dead (v. 29)?

Leader's Note: *The Quest Study Bible says, "One view (among many for this verse) is that some Corinthian believers were worried about the salvation of believers who had died without being baptized, so they were baptized in proxy for the dead. Why did Paul recognize the practice, though, almost appearing to endorse it? It seems he was revealing an inconsistency in their logic. If they didn't believe in the future resurrection, then there was no point in their proxy baptisms. Paul did not sanction the practice; he simply used the behavior of his opponents to make a persuasive point."*

[Q] What does Paul mean when he says he dies every day (v. 31)?

Leader's Note: *He probably means that he is willing to give up his life for the sake of the gospel.*

Teaching point three: The resurrection body takes away the sting of death.

In the autumn of 1873, Horatio Spafford, a wealthy Chicago businessman, placed his wife, Anna, and their four children on the *Ville du Havre*, sailing from New York to France. He was forced to stay in the United States for several more weeks to settle some business matters before he could journey to join his family in Europe.

The evening of November 21 found the *Ville du Havre* prow-east toward France on a calm Atlantic. The journey was progressing beautifully. A few hours later, about two o'clock in the morning on November 22, the *Ville du Havre* was carrying its sleeping passengers over a quiet sea when two terrific claps like thunder were followed by frightened screams. The engine stopped, the ship stood still. Passageways were filled with terrified, half-dressed people shouting questions that no one could answer. The *Ville du Havre* had been rammed by the English vessel, the *Lochearn*.

Mrs. Spafford saw three of her children swept away by the sea while she stood clutching the youngest child. Suddenly, she felt her baby torn violently from her arms. She reached out



through the water and caught little Tanetta's gown. For a minute she held her again. Then the cloth was wrenched from her hand. She reached out again and touched a man's leg in corduroy trousers. She became unconscious. She awoke later, finding that she had been rescued by sailors from the *Lochearn*. But her four children were gone.

In the meantime, Horatio Spafford was back in the United States, desperate to receive news of his family. Finally, the blow fell. A cable arrived from Wales stating that the four daughters were lost at sea, but his wife was still alive. He was crushed by what had happened. All night he walked the floor in anguish. Toward the morning he turned to his friend, Major Whittle, and said, "I am glad to trust the Lord when it will cost me something."

On the way across the Atlantic to join his wife, the captain announced that they were now passing the place where the *Ville du Havre* was wrecked. For Horatio Spafford, this was passing through the valley of the shadow of death. He sat down in his cabin on the high seas, near the place where his children perished, and wrote the hymn that would give comfort to so many, titled "It Is Well with My Soul." (John Huffman, "The Fruit of the Spirit Is Peace," PreachingToday.com)

Read 1 Corinthians 15:35–58.

[Q] Why is it not important to know much about what our resurrected bodies will be like (v. 38)?

[Q] List the contrasts in verses 42–44 between our earthly and heavenly bodies.

Optional Activity

Purpose: To bring the contrasts between our earthly and heavenly bodies home to us.

Activity: Advise the following people as to how their new bodies will be far greater than their present ones.

- Jeannie has stage-four cancer and is undergoing chemotherapy and radiation.
- Peter has just beaten a long-standing drug addiction. His body chemistry is still paying the price of his habit.
- Lucy was born with a weak heart and has never had any physical stamina.

[Q] What is the last trumpet (v. 52)?

Leader's Note: The last trumpet was a common way to refer to the end times during Paul's lifetime. He applied it to the trumpet that blows to announce the Lord's return and final judgment.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Charles Colson, convicted for his involvement in the Watergate scandal as an assistant to President Richard Nixon, writes:



When I am challenged on the resurrection, my answer is always that the disciples and 500 others gave eyewitness accounts of seeing Jesus risen from the tomb. But then I'm asked, "How do you know they were telling the truth? Maybe they were perpetrating a hoax." My answer to that comes from an unlikely source: Watergate.

Watergate involved a conspiracy perpetuated by the closest aides to the president of the United States—the most powerful men in America, who were intensely loyal to their president. But one of them, John Dean, turned state's evidence, that is, testified against Nixon, as he put it, "to save his own skin"—and he did so only two weeks after informing the president about what was really going on—two weeks! The cover-up, the lie, could only be held together for two weeks, and then everybody else jumped ship in order to save themselves. Now, the fact is that all those around the president were facing was embarrassment, maybe prison. Nobody's life was at stake.

But what about the disciples? Twelve powerless men, peasants really, were facing not just embarrassment or political disgrace, but beatings, stonings, execution. Every single one of the disciples insisted, to their dying breaths, that they had physically seen Jesus bodily raised from the dead. Don't you think that one of those apostles would have cracked before being beheaded or stoned? That one of them would have made a deal with the authorities? None did. Men will give their lives for something they believe to be true; they will never give their lives for something they know to be false.

The Watergate cover-up reveals the true nature of humanity. Even political zealots at the pinnacle of power will, in the crunch, save their own necks, even at the expense of the ones they profess to serve so loyally. But the apostles could not deny Jesus, because they had seen him face to face, and they knew he had risen from the dead.

No, you can take it from an expert in cover-ups—I've lived through Watergate—that nothing less than a resurrected Christ could have caused those men to maintain to their dying whispers that Jesus is alive and is Lord. Two thousand years later, nothing less than the power of the risen Christ could inspire Christians around the world to remain faithful—despite prison, torture, and death. Jesus is Lord: That's the thrilling message of Easter. It's a historic fact, one convincingly established by the evidence—and one you can bet your life upon. (BreakPoint Online Commentaries, 4-29-02)

Action Point: Read 1 Corinthians 15:58 again. What should be the result in our lives of Christ conquering death once and for all? Name one thing that needs to change in your life as you meditate on this good news.



Study Through the Bible

1 Corinthians: Basic Christian Living - Study 7

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

The Last Enemy Destroyed

The risen Christ is our only hope in this life and the next.

All of us dread the process of growing old and dying. But Paul assures us that the resurrection of Christ has removed the sting of death. We not only have the fear removed; we have a joy set before us that is worth whatever we have to face in this life.

Scripture:

1 Corinthians 15

Based on:

The Parenting/Family section of the *Woman's Life Bible* (2001, Thomas Nelson, Inc.)

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

First Corinthians 15 offers a triumphant picture of victory over death. “Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (15:20). Paul described the hope of healthy new bodies, fit for eternity with Jesus.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Christ’s resurrection is foundational to our faith.

Teaching point two: Christ’s resurrection gives us hope for our own resurrection.

Teaching point three: The resurrection body takes away the sting of death.

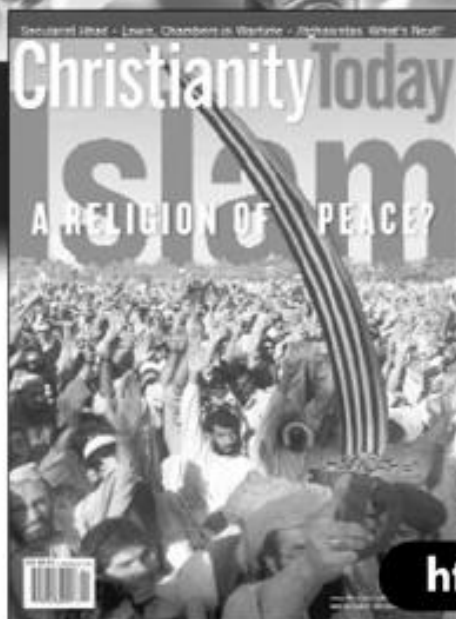
PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Christ’s resurrection is central to what we believe. Because he rose from the dead, we, too, have a certain hope of gaining a new, indestructible body. His resurrection takes away the fear and sting of death once and for all.



UNDERSTAND THE WORLD



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