



A Bible Reading Plan for 1 Corinthians

October 31 - November 27, 2016

Mountain Brook Baptist Church
www.mbbc.org



1 Corinthians

ABOUT PROJECT 119

Project 119 is a Bible reading initiative of Mountain Brook Baptist Church. Our hope is that every member of our church body would be encouraged in his or her relationship with Jesus Christ through the regular reading of God's Word.

This reading plan will guide you through the book of 1 Corinthians. The plan provides you a devotional thought and suggested Scripture reading for each day of the week. On the weekends, we suggest that you re-read the Scripture passages that you have been working through during the past week.

To receive email updates when devotionals are added to the blog, go to www.mbbc.org/blog, click on "Subscribe to Mountain Brook Blog by Email" and follow the instructions. To learn more about Project 119 and to access previous plans, visit www.mbbc.org/project119.

INTRODUCTION

1 Corinthians is one of Paul's letters to the church at Corinth, a church he helped plant in the early 50s with Priscilla and Aquilla. After leaving Corinth for his ministry at Ephesus, Paul received word that divisions and sexual misconduct were plaguing the church. Paul writes to these believers he loves and cherishes to remind them of the truth of the gospel, calling them to live in step with what they claim to believe. Corinth was a very cultured Roman colony filled with idol worship and rampant immorality. In the face of this culture, Paul calls the church to walk in holiness. He also calls them to unity, reminding the church that they are the body of Christ and that social distinctions and divisions should no longer govern how they treat one another. Although Paul's letter was written long ago, he also speaks to the church today as we live in an increasingly secular era and face many social divisions; Paul too calls us to holiness and unity, reminding us that God's love, best seen through the cross of Christ, ought to transform and govern our actions.



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WEEK ONE: 1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-4:21
OCTOBER 31 - NOVEMBER 6

Monday, October 31 | 1 Corinthians 1:1-17 | Doug Dortch

"A Contentious Church"

I have always looked at 1 Corinthians with deep appreciation because of how it reminds me that there is no such thing as a perfect church. You read 1 Corinthians and you see deep divisions between the believers, all centered on personalities that had been instrumental in their faith journeys. There was even a "Jesus" group, which more than likely reflects an elitist mentality among members of that particular party.

Paul wasted no time chiding the church for allowing its fellowship to be disrupted over personalities. Even though he had his own backers, Paul made it clear that no human being merited elevation over any other. As he would contend later (1 Corinthians 12:27), we all belong to Christ, whom he saw as the true head of the church.

I guess it is human nature to want to follow other humans because we like them or identify with them or want to emulate them. But allowing human nature to drive the fellowship of the church of Jesus Christ is a sure recipe for its demise. How much better is it for us to look to Jesus and to find our unity in Him!

Tuesday, November 1 | 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 | Doug Dortch

"The Cross as the Wisdom and Power of God"

How else could Paul deal with such division as had developed in the church at Corinth other than to call them together around the one thing each group had in common: the cross of Jesus Christ. Granted, the cross was difficult for both Jews and Greeks. The former group saw it as a stumbling block because of the manner in which it represented Roman oppression, while the latter thought the idea of a divine being suffering such ignominy as ludicrous. But as Paul reminded the church, for those who had embraced it as a sign of divine grace, it was nothing less than the power of God.

I remember a story of a little boy who one Easter season announced to his Sunday School class that Jesus had died on "the power lines." The teacher was confused until the boy took out a piece of paper and drew a picture of Jesus on the cross, which to him looked much like the power lines that brought electricity to his house. It was an "aha" moment for the teacher as she began to ponder just how accurate the little boy's description was of Jesus' sacrificial death at Calvary.

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How does the old saying put it? “The ground is level at the foot of the cross.” In other words, we all find our salvation through Jesus doing us for there what none of could ever have done for himself or herself. How wise was God to think of such salvation and how powerful His grace is when we claim it in our lives. The weaker and more foolish we are, the more we come to understand and appreciate all that God has done for us and our salvation.

Wednesday, November 2 | 1 Corinthians 2:1-16 | Doug Dortch

“The Mind of Christ”

Because Corinth was a significant city in ancient Greece, philosophy was elevated as a badge of cultural pride. Even average citizens had studied the great philosophers, and they filtered every message through their teachings.

Paul, the great missionary to the Gentiles, knew that he would never gain a hearing in Corinth by appealing to its citizens on philosophical grounds. However, he was a master rhetorician, another area of philosophy special to the Greeks, and so Paul “backdoored” them by offering an entirely type of “wisdom” (1 Corinthians 2:6) – one that was grounded in a new revelation of God’s powerful presence in the cross of Jesus Christ. Paul knew that though the Greeks had their gods, none of them actually cared for humankind enough to be invested in their well-being, certainly not enough in doing what God did for us in sending His Son to be the means to our salvation.

Our world today still operates by a different set of values from what we know in the church. It’s important that we understand those values, but only so that we might better counter them with the message of grace that points people to a better way. Paul called that approach having “the mind of Christ.” The more we operate out of such a mind, the more we come to understand God’s redemptive purposes, to be blessed by them, and to help others be blessed by them as well.

Thursday, November 3 | 1 Corinthians 3:1-23 | Doug Dortch

“The Temple of God”

Most of us think of temples as physical structures where people gather to worship. Certainly the ancient Greeks had their share of temples, including the famous Temple of Aphrodite in Corinth, dedicated to the goddess of entertainment. So, when Paul spoke with the Corinthians about being “the temple of God,” they had some inkling as to what he meant.

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You'll notice that Paul went into great detail about the importance of the believers having an appropriate foundation for establishing God's presence in their midst. Instead of depending on human personalities (including Paul himself!), Paul mentioned Jesus as the one firm foundation who would keep the church standing, regardless of the challenges that might come against it, both without and within.

Sometimes I wonder if we haven't tried to make church today more "entertaining" than obedient. I'm not suggesting that we shouldn't enjoy on some level our time together in worship, fellowship, and service. But I am suggesting that all of these concerns pale in comparison to our calling to grow up and around Jesus so that in our every word and deed we show ourselves as belonging to Him. If we did, I think the likelihood of our attracting a new generation of believers will be much greater, for He is far more appealing than we are and His grace ensures that our witness will most assuredly endure.

Friday, November 4 | 1 Corinthians 4:1-21 | Doug Dortch

"Servants and Stewards"

We tend to think that everyone loved everyone else in the early church. The truth of the matter is that people often got at odds with one another then, as they do today. Some looked at others in their day as cynically and as skeptically as some look at others even now.

Paul himself had to endure those sorts of doubt, in large measure because of how his past life as an enemy of Christ never really disappeared from people's thinking. Since perception was as much reality then as it is today, Paul often found himself on the defensive, and for some reason that was the case a good bit of the time in Corinth. While we see more of a defense of his ministry in 2 Corinthians, this chapter shows how the seeds of such cynicism were being planted even at this time.

Paul defends himself by saying that he only sees himself as a servant and a steward. He's been entrusted with a great treasure, the gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, and Paul wants nothing more than to magnify Jesus and the sufficiency of His grace. Paul certainly is not interested in any self-gain; he prefers to speak of himself as a "fool for Christ." I can't think of a term more self-deprecating than that one. And most remarkable of all, he calls upon the Corinthians to join him in going to the back of the church bus! (1 Corinthians 4:16)

In a day when more people are interested in promoting themselves, this word is a most difficult one for us to hear. But it is necessary that we do so in order to experience the fullness of God's power. As Paul reminds us, "the kingdom of God is not in word but in power" (1 Corinthians 4:20), and blessed (continued on next page)



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are those who empty themselves of all pride in order that they might then be available to be filled with all grace.

Saturday, November 5-Sunday, November 6 | 1 Corinthians 1:1-4:21

Reread 1 Corinthians 1:1-4:21 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



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WEEK TWO: 1 CORINTHIANS 5:1- NOVEMBER 7-13

Monday, November 7 | 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 | Taylor Geurin

The professor of Pastoral Counseling at my seminary almost always began her classes the same way. As class started she would state the following: "I've got issues, you've got issues, all of God's children have issues."

Maybe you have gotten this far in 1 Corinthians and have realized one thing: these children of God are dealing with some issues. You see clearly now that chapter 5 is no exception. These children of God are allowing some within the body to walk in a lifestyle that is quite contrary to the word of God. If you are like me then you certainly cringed a little as you read this chapter!

Paul is doing something in 1 Corinthians 5 that I fear our current culture sometimes has trouble doing. What Paul is doing is calling sin for what it is: sin. There were some in the church at Corinth who were in blatant, unrepentant sin. Because of this, Paul calls for church discipline! This isn't just discipline for discipline's sake. This was discipline that would hopefully lead to this person's repentance, salvation, and restoration to the church. This discipline would also help ensure that the church does not lose its integrity and witness within Corinth.

Though maybe we don't struggle in the ways mentioned here, it does certainly challenge us to consider if we are living a life that builds up or tears down the integrity and witness of the church. Are there sins in our own life we need to repent of so that we can be right with God and a right witness for the church? Remember that in Scripture we see that the church is the bride of Christ. Are we showing ourselves to be the bride that he calls us to be? May it be true of Mountain Brook Baptist and the Christian church as a whole that its members live in such a way that brings honor to the Savior who we worship!

Tuesday, November 8 | 1 Corinthians 6:1-20 | Taylor Geurin

There are many things in life that are good when used properly and bad when used improperly. There are dozens of examples out there! For instance, a car is a great mode of transportation when it is on the road but doesn't get you as far when it goes on water. That same car is great when in the hands of someone who is age sixteen or older but not so much for someone who is six. You see, things are good and proper when they are used in right places and at right times. The water was the wrong place. The age of six was the wrong time.

Some of the Corinthians were using their bodies in improper ways (detestable sexual practices)
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and at improper times (apart from marriage). Paul, as he does in chapter 5, calls sin for what it is.

Paul shows us that much of this sin springs up from an improper understanding of our bodies. Our bodies are not ours so that we can do with them whatever we desire. Instead, our bodies belong to the Holy Spirit. Paul had great sorrow because of the fact that many in the church at Corinth were taking their homes of the Holy Spirit and committing sexual sin. Christ purchased us at great price in order to save and sanctify us - soul and body!

May we ever remember that within us, the Holy Spirit makes His home, and is doing a sanctifying work in us that we could never do on our own.

Wednesday, November 9 | 1 Corinthians 7:1-24 | Taylor Geurin

Paul does something very important in verses 17-24. Maybe, if your Bible is similar to mine, you see a heading that says something like, "Live as you are called." I love that Paul calls these believers to live out their callings in the context that they were in when they received it. Maybe one believer came to know God out of a religious background that required circumcision while another came from uncircumcision. Or maybe one is a freed person while the other is a slave (bondservant: generally working for pay and eventually able to buy freedom). Paul proclaims in verse 24, "So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God."

Sometimes when we think of the *called* person we think of the pastor, associate pastor, youth pastor, music minister, etc. What if we allowed ourselves to reconsider this definition of *calling*? Maybe God is saying to us today, as those who have received His calling on our lives, that we should live out our calling within the context He has placed us.

What if the accountant saw this field as his or her ministry because they show how the fine details of numbers relate to the way in which God knows the fine details of all those whom he has created? What if the lawyer ministers in the arena of the court room as he or she points to the God who is the ultimate source of justice? What if the homemaker makes his or her home for the glory of God because a home that is built upon the Lord's foundation will honor His name and show the world His glory?

I challenge you today to consider the specific context into which God has called you. How can you use your context and position to further His kingdom? I am thankful for the calling God has put on my own life as well as the specific one He has put on yours. May we work together in all of our respective callings to bring glory to His name.



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Thursday, November 10 | 1 Corinthians 7:25-40 | Taylor Geurin

I couldn't sit down with you right now and tell you the plot of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*; however, I am fairly certain that you and I both could recite that famous line from the play: "To be or not to be, that is the question." In 1 Corinthians 7:25-40, Paul is answering a very important question for us: Is it good to be or not to be married? Paul's answer is quite simple - yes.

Just as he instructed us in verses 17-24, similarly here he charges us to stay within the context that we have been placed.

I think that it is important that the church view marriage and singleness both as kingdom-honoring services. Sometimes, if we are not careful, we can make marriage into an idol and singleness into something "less-than." How wrong are we to say this! Too often we fail to speak about what a gift singleness can be both for the individual and for the church body. Paul is quick to explain how the single individual is able to serve in ways the married individual can not. Singleness is not a consolation. It's a ministry!

I am thankful for Paul's ministry-mindedness. Paul desires that the gospel would be spread during the days that we have on this earth and seeks that we all do this within our current context. If we are married, we don't get to skip out on the mission! If we are single, we don't either! May we be about the work of the Lord, in full joy, within the context that He has placed us.

Friday, November 11 | 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 | Taylor Geurin

Often in the ancient world, most meats that were sold in the marketplace came from animals that had been sacrificed through pagan rituals. One of the major questions for the church at Corinth was whether or not they could buy and eat these meats. Could the believer eat what had formerly been offered to an idol?

Paul's answer is quite simple. Idols actually have no existence. Just because those who sacrifice to such idols proclaim their existence, doesn't make it true. Any food that is offered to an idol is simply offered to a non-entity. As Paul reminds us in verse 6, there is only one God the Father, and one Lord, Jesus Christ.

Paul's answer suddenly gets a little bit more complex when he considers that not everyone's conscience will confirm this with ease. While some may have no difficulty embracing this truth, others may still struggle with a type of pluralism where they have a knowledge of Christ, yet still seek to appease the idols they once solely served.

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With this in mind, Paul does something very noble. He asks that those who have these stronger consciences do not eat in such a way that would cause their brother or sister to stumble. He goes so far as to say that if food makes his brother stumble, he will never eat meat!

Have you ever laid down your rights for the sake of a brother or sister? Even though it likely doesn't involved meats sacrificed to idols, these type of situations can still occur in our own contexts. We can be thankful for the freedom that Christ has given us while also being thoughtful of those who are new to this road of sanctification. May we be willing and able to lay down our rights for our fellow brother or sister, never forgetting that our salvation has been given because the Son of God first laid down His rights for our sakes!

Saturday, November 12-Sunday, November 13 | 1 Corinthian 5:1-8:13

Reread 1 Corinthians 5:1-8:13 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



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WEEK THREE: 1 CORINTHIANS 9:1-12:31 NOVEMBER 14-20

Monday, November 14 | 1 Corinthians 9:1-27 | Amy Jackson

In the last few years, I've taken up running - although it's really more of a slow jog than a sprint! I've been in enough races to be able to spot those who run competitively and distinguish them from the ones who run recreationally, like me. People who run competitively - they're focused. You can see it on their faces even before the race has started - they're mentally preparing for a goal they set long ago. They've put long hours and hard work into upping their pace and increasing their mileage so that they might be the first to cross the finish line.

For us, it might seem crazy to think about the sacrifices some runners make - getting up a few hours earlier than normal, enduring brutally cold temperatures in the winter, dealing with blisters - but for those who are focused on winning, they see the end goal in mind and, for them, nothing surpasses the value of being a medalist in that race. Paul uses a similar metaphor here as he considers our call to share the gospel. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul argues that nothing can surpass the value of making Christ known. Paul's ultimate goal isn't a medal in a race but the advancement of the gospel - and he explains that he will endure whatever hardships or sacrifices are necessary to make this good news known.

I love the end of 1 Corinthians 9 - Paul compares this task of sharing Christ's story with the task of a runner. Corinth was the host to the Isthmian games so this imagery would have been familiar to the Corinthians. Paul reminds us that only one runner wins the prize - he encourages believers to also "run" in such a way that we might win it (1 Corinthians 9:24). He also reminds us of the supreme lasting value of the task we are called to as followers of Christ. Athletes receive crowns that will eventually crumble, and even Olympic gold medals will one day fade - but our inheritance is imperishable and undefiled (1 Corinthians 9:25, 1 Peter 1:4). With that in mind, Paul calls us to wholeheartedly pursue the Lord and commit to making Him known, reminding us that even the sacrifices we may make along the way are temporary in the light of eternity.

Tuesday, November 15 | 1 Corinthians 10:1-11:1 | Amy Jackson

Recently I was reading Numbers and I was struck by the Israelites' blatant sin in Numbers 13-14. It seems ridiculous to me that the Israelites could see God work in such amazing ways, and then a few chapters later, reject all that He has done, trading it all away for an idol they created (Exodus 32-34). In this story in Numbers, the Israelites doubt God's protection going forward into Canaan; they fear the giants and lament, wishing they could go back to Egypt.

Take a moment for that to sink in. They wished that they could go back to Egypt - to a land of
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oppression, where they made bricks without straw, where they saw their sons be thrown into the Nile River and killed, where they were servants with few freedoms. Paul tell us that, because of their idolatry, God was displeased with them and allowed them to be overthrown in the wilderness (1 Corinthians 10:5).

It's easy for us to judge the Israelites, but unfortunately we have more in common with them than we'd like to admit. Paul tells us that the Israelites are an example for us of the dangers of sin (1 Corinthians 10:6-7). We too have seen the goodness and majesty and mercy of God - not in manna rained down from heaven or a pillar of fire lighting our way through the desert, but through the cross. The cross is Jesus' call to us, to come and be made whole - to be reconciled with God.

Because of Jesus' work on the cross for us, Paul calls us to "flee from idolatry" (1 Corinthians 10:14). Paul reminds us that, like the Israelites, we have seen God work in miraculous ways. He has brought us from death to life through the death of His son. What's more, when we partake of the Lord's Supper, we are also participating in fellowship with the Lord and pointing back to His death, to His body which was broken for us and His blood which was shed for the forgiveness of our sin.

Paul tells us that we shouldn't be like the Israelites - he calls us to remember what was done for us through the cross. Don't go back into idolatry - forsake immorality and flee from sin, because those things are no longer your masters! Why would we go back to partaking of the cup of sin when we have been washed in the blood of Jesus (1 Corinthians 10:21)? While we will continue to struggle with sin on this side of eternity, sin is no longer our master. Paul encourages us to live into that identity today - as children of God rather than slaves to sin.

Wednesday, November 16 | 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 | Amy Jackson

This isn't the easiest passage to understand, but we have to remember two important points when we come to confusing passages. First, we trust that all Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for equipping the saints (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Second, we realize that Scripture must be interpreted in its context. We, as twenty-first century believers, live in a different time; we have to remember that Scripture addresses specific problems in specific times which may not translate perfectly to our world. However, we hold this second principle in tension with the first, trusting that all Scripture is inspired by God and points us to His character and to our call to be like Him.

With these principles in mind, let's look at 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, where Paul address social divisions within the diverse Corinthian church. Apparently, there were some wealthier women in the church who were coming to worship dressed in the latest fashions, with their heads uncovered. This might sound like a non-issue to us, but people in the first-century would probably be horrified with how we dress today. In those days, women didn't show a lot of bare skin, even on their arms. One commentator
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compared women wearing their heads uncovered to worship in the first-century with what it might be like in our world if women wore bikinis to worship. Certainly the degrees of coverage are different, but in the first-century, even the sign of a woman's uncovered head was a symbol of seduction. What's more, since the wealthier women were wearing their hair uncovered and dressing in the latest fashions, this caused tension in a church with women from different economic backgrounds, especially those living in poverty who couldn't afford to wear such nice things.

Paul isn't writing to tell these women that uncovering their heads is evil, but he is writing to remind them not to be a stumbling block to others - to men in their church, as well as other women. Rather than being a distraction in worship, he encourages them to love others well by practicing modesty for the sakes of their husbands and their congregation, to "let all that [they] do be done in love" (1 Corinthians 16:14).

Now, I don't think Paul isn't commanding women today us to cover their heads - but because all Scripture is profitable, I think this passage can help us, as men and women, reflect on how we present ourselves. Do we dress and act modestly? Are there things in our lives that might be stumbling blocks to those weaker in faith? As you reflect today, ask yourself the question, "Is everything I am doing done in love?" (1 Corinthians 16:14)? Do my actions, words, and clothing point to Christ, or do they cause distractions? Pray that the Lord would help us to love others well, for the sake of the gospel and for the upbuilding of the saints.

Thursday, November 17 | 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 | Amy Jackson

Have you ever been in a situation where you realize that actions really do speak louder than words? Often we might say we believe one thing, but our actions show that we believe another. This is kind of what is going on in the church at Corinth, especially when it came to factions or divisions within the congregation.

In this section, Paul continues to address issues bringing discord to the church. Word had traveled to Paul that the believers in Corinth were observing communion with elaborate love feasts funded by the wealthy in the congregation. However, some congregants were feasting on the meal - and even getting drunk - instead of waiting for everyone to partake. In particular, the poor were being left out and going hungry (1 Corinthians 12:21).

We don't celebrate "love feasts" or entire meals when we take communion, but I think what Paul is saying can translate to us pretty well. Paul reminds us here that Christ's death gives us new perspective on how to love one another well. Philippians 2 paints a picture of this self-sacrifice: Jesus, fully God and fully man, chooses to come to earth and put on humanity, making Himself nothing. He empties
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Himself of all glory by going to the cross, where he sheds His blood for people who are totally undeserving of such lavish love and affection. You see, believers in Corinth were partaking of the Lord's Supper, but their actions weren't proclaiming Christ's self-sacrificial death but rather their selfish mindsets motivated by greed, gluttony, and self-interest.

When we partake of the Lord's Supper, we proclaim that this is the body of Christ broken for us, and the blood of Christ, shed for us. We proclaim this self-sacrificial, extravagant love that has been poured out for us, even though we've done nothing to merit such favor. And when we really begin to understand Jesus' love, His love changes how we love others. It turns our worldly economies upside down - people matter because they are made in the image of God, not because of where they are from, what they do, or how much money they make. In the kingdom of God, the first shall be last and the last shall be first, because Jesus was the first (John 1:1) and He made Himself last. We begin to see that, regardless of our socioeconomic status or educational background, we really are just "beggars telling other beggars where to find bread" (Martin Luther).

Friday, November 18 | 1 Corinthians 12:1-31 | Amy Jackson

I taught Mission Friends for a while and loved it. One thing I discovered is that children have a preference for what type of lollipop they get. Sometimes, it's easier to give everyone the same thing rather than having to hear "But I wanted the blue one, Ms. Amy!" over and over. (This is why teachers learn the phrase, "You get what you get and you don't pitch a fit."). You see, working with kids helped show me a lot about myself as an adult. We think the same things as kids do - we just have a filter and know how to appear more civilized.

The Corinthians asked Paul to explain more about spiritual gifts. Paul's response aims to help the Corinthians understand three things about spiritual gifts: first, all believers are given spiritual gifts by God; second, the diversity of spiritual gifts is a reflection of the diversity of God that we see in the Trinity; and third, all spiritual gifts are needed and beneficial to the body of Christ.

Paul reminds the Corinthians that they've all been given spiritual gifts from God and that their gifts are different - they are unique but equal. In God's economy, every part of the body is integral and is uniquely equipped to serve it (1 Corinthians 12:12-26). There's no need to pitch a fit over who received which spiritual gift or to feel inferior or superior because of the gift received. But Paul didn't just write this to the Corinthians - this is also true for us because God continues to give His children spiritual gifts! Spend time today reflecting on how God has gifted you by reading through some of these spiritual gifts lists (1 Corinthians 12:7-11, 28; Romans 12:3-8; Ephesians 4:11-12).

Don't just think about the gifts - the point of receiving spiritual gifts is that you use them! How are you
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engaging in the body of Christ and using your gifts for His glory, for the upbuilding of the kingdom, and for the encouragement of the saints? Paul reminds us that every part of the body is important and needed. We need eyes and ears and hands and feet - we need those with gifts of teaching and encouragement, of service and helping, of hospitality and administration. You are a part of the body of Christ and have been uniquely equipped and gifted - and we need you!

Saturday, November 19-Sunday, November 20 | 1 Corinthians 9:1-12:31

Reread 1 Corinthians 9:1-12:31 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



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**WEEK FOUR: 1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-16:24
NOVEMBER 21-27**

Monday, November 21 | 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 | Amy Jackson

Most people are familiar with 1 Corinthians 13. Yet there's a temptation to leave these verses in the abstract without considering their concrete ramifications. This passage may look nice and neat on a cross-stitch piece in your home or sound eloquent at a wedding, but walking in this kind of love isn't always nice and neat - sometimes it's messy and painful and inconvenient.

On our own, we can't live up to these standards. Sometimes I sigh at weddings when pastors read 1 Corinthians 13 because of the irony - the bride and groom will repeatedly fail to meet these standards. But the good news of the gospel is that we love because Jesus first loved us (1 John 4:19). Jesus sets the standard for this kind of love because Jesus is the supreme example of the unconditional love Paul writes about here. Jesus is patient and kind with us sinners. He isn't arrogant or rude. He hates evil - He doesn't rejoice at wrongdoing, but delights in truth.

Yet there's also exhortation here! Paul doesn't just tell us what Jesus' love is like; he also calls us to show this kind of love to those around us - even when it is messy and inconvenient and difficult. Change the word "love" to your name in these verses. It's kind of hard to hear this "re-writing," isn't it? Amy certainly isn't always patient and kind. The good news here is that, though we can't do it on our own, the Holy Spirit works in our hearts over time to make us more like Jesus and to help us love others well.

You see, it is one thing to love people abstractly - to put them in a box and to love them when it's convenient for you. It's another thing to love real people well - even when it is really hard and messy. But we're reminded that this is how Jesus loved us. He gave up all of His rights, "became flesh and blood and moved into our neighborhood" (John 1:14, *The Message*), and made Himself nothing so that we might know Him. Pray that Jesus would empower you to love people with this kind of love - with a love that is steadfast and doesn't fade, with a love that doesn't shirk from the messiness or inconvenience of life, and with a love that looks beyond the brokenness of today, a love that is transformed by the cross to "bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things" (1 Corinthians 13:7).

Tuesday, November 22 | 1 Corinthians 14:1-40 | Amy Jackson

What is the church? If you met someone who had no experience with church, how would you describe the local body of believers that meets each week? What would you tell them about church? What would stand out to you as the things that define a church?

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Church history and theologians help us think about this question. We could define church in a lot of ways - by our style of worship, by our method of preaching or teaching, by our denomination - but above and beyond all of those things, theologians tells us that a church is a place where the word of God is preached and the sacraments are observed.

I think it could be easy to get lost in the rhetoric of 1 Corinthians 14 and all of the details regarding speaking in tongues. In fact, these verses might distract us from the actual point of the passage as we begin to think about speaking in tongues today and to debate the usefulness and validity of this gift. I think Paul makes it clear here that this is a spiritual gift, but he also reminds us that prophecy, the gift of declaring God's word, should be more highly desired. Paul imagines unbelievers walking into a worship service where people are speaking tongues without an interpreter - they would think Christians were crazy! On the other hand, he points out that it's often through observing the gift of prophecy that people come to faith. When unbelievers come to church and hear God's word proclaimed, the Holy Spirit works in their hearts to convict them of sin (John 16:8) and to bring them to repentance.

The Holy Spirit also works in the hearts of believers as we hear God's word proclaimed! Each Sunday, we hear the gospel preached and we are reminded of our brokenness and fallenness, of our need for His grace and our need to repent, and this news brings us to worship (1 Corinthians 14:25).

This week when you come to church, come with the mindset that you aren't coming to just hear people sing and socialize, or to catch up on the latest news. Fellowship and singing are significant parts of our lives as believers in the body, yes, but the primary reason we come to church is to hear the gospel preached - to hear God's word proclaimed. Pray that the Holy Spirit would work, through the preaching of God's word, to convict unbelievers of sin and to remind us of the good news of the gospel.

Wednesday, November 23 | 1 Corinthians 15:1-34 | Amy Jackson

Some news changes everything. I have vivid memories of sitting in my homeroom as a high school freshmen on September 11, 2001, not realizing that life as I knew it - as a citizen of the U.S. - was about to change forever.

This is essentially the message that Paul is giving the Corinthians. Their lives have not been changed because of a terrorist attack or a new invention; rather, because of the truth of the gospel and the hope of the resurrection, everything has changed. This belief in a resurrected body didn't come naturally to the Corinthians; they lived in a world heavily influenced by the Greek thought that the mind was superior to the body. While people in the church may have accepted Christ's resurrection, they had a hard time coming to terms with the notion that all believers would be resurrected.

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I think it's helpful to think about this passage in negative and positive terms, which is what Paul does here. First, Paul reminds us that, if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ also hasn't been raised - and this is bad news. It means that we are still dead in our sins, that death still reigns even over believers, and that our faith is basically pointless (1 Corinthians 15:16-17). If this is true, why even bother? Why are we still preaching the gospel? Why are we wasting time by preaching a futile faith that just brings unnecessary suffering and inconvenience? If the resurrection isn't true, Paul tells us to just enjoy the temporary pleasures of this life because that's all we have (1 Corinthians 15:32).

But the good news of the gospel is not just that Christ died, but also that He was raised, and because our fate is caught up in Christ's fate, we will also be raised to life. And this news changes everything about how we live now. It changes how we share the gospel, giving us confidence in our calling to tell others about Jesus, realizing that we are sharing good news which changes lives. It changes how we suffer, helping us to see that we live in a world tainted by sin and broken by the Fall, but for those trust in Christ, death is not the end: Paul reminds us that even death will one day die because of Jesus' resurrection. It even changes how we grieve, helping us to grieve with hope. It also changes our perspective as citizens looking forward to a better home in a land led by a perfect King, whose rule will never be subverted.

Thursday, November 24 | 1 Corinthians 15:35-58 | Amy Jackson

Previously Paul worked to help us to see the truth of the resurrection; now he spends some time helping us understand what it means that we'll have resurrection bodies. First, Paul reminds us that resurrection bodies have tasted death. Paul gives us an agricultural metaphor to help us understand this - the picture of a seed being buried in the ground gives us a small picture of the resurrection. When believers die, our bodies are like seeds put in the ground. When we are raised to life, we will be given new bodies - but this comes after death, much like seeds only give birth to grain after they are buried and die (1 Corinthians 15:35-36).

Second, Paul tells us that our resurrection bodies will be different - but resurrection isn't reincarnation. After all, we aren't raised as cats, in resurrected feline bodies. We will have a resurrected human body, like the body of Jesus. And really, most of what we know about the resurrection body comes from what we know about Jesus' resurrected body - because He is the only one who has experienced such a resurrection so far! We will no longer experience dishonor, decay, or weakness; our bodies will be imperishable and clothed in God's glory.

Third, Paul reminds us that resurrection bodies are bodies that have been "raised" by God. Count the number of times you see the verb "raised" in this chapter. This is a good reminder - resurrection is not something we do but something that is done for us. Namely, God is the one who raised Jesus from the dead and God is the one who will raise us from the dead and give life to our earthly bodies - we
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can't save ourselves and we can't raise ourselves. Just as God is the one who gives life to plants, He is also the one who will give life to the dead.

Fourth, Paul reminds us that resurrection will happen in a moment, that, in the "twinkling of an eye," this will be reality one day for those who trust in Christ. Resurrection isn't happening slowly, over time; rather, Paul points to a definite moment in the future when Christ will break into time and space and history and come again, not as a baby but as a King ready to rule. On that day, the dead in Christ will be raised and will be changed. We will experience true life - in bodies that do not decay, unfettered by sin's chains and the corruption of the Fall. On that day we will proclaim that death has no sting over us, because death itself will die.

Praise God for this imperishable hope we have because of the resurrection - though outwardly we are wasting away, inwardly we are being transformed by God's spirit and are promised a day when we will be raised to life eternal (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

Friday, November 25 | 1 Corinthians 16:1-24 | Amy Jackson

Sometimes the ending of epistles can seem disorganized; often Paul gives his readers a few reminders, updates them on where he's going, and gives practical requests (like asking for his cloak, books, and parchments in 2 Timothy 4:13). I think we can be tempted to skim the endings of epistles, but this passage challenged me - I think we can learn a lot about the church through a closer study of epistles' endings.

First, we see this call to worship and give. Isn't it interesting to reflect on the reminder that believers have been gathering to worship for thousands of years? Granted, our worship looks different in some regards, but we have some commonalities, including meeting on the "first day of every week" (1 Corinthians 16:2), and taking up collections for those in need. Times may change, but God's commands to care for His people and to observe the Sabbath in worship continue.

Second, we see that churches are made up of people. I think there's a temptation to think that the early church was just the apostles and Paul, going from city to city to share the good news. While they were instrumental in the spread of the gospel, there were so many other saints, often listed in the last chapters of epistles, who also played a part in this work. Just like we are tempted to forget about the lesser-named saints in the New Testament, I think we also have a tendency to think that ministry is just for ministers. Paul makes it clear that we are all ministers and a part of the priesthood of believers, called to also "devote [ourselves] to the service of the saints" (1 Corinthians 16:15).

Third, we see a picture of the church waiting for Christ's return. The last phrase in verse 22, "Our Lord, come!" is a phrase in Aramaic (maranatha) which originated among Palestinian believers. Have you
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ever noticed how often the early church prayed for the second coming? I bet we might have better eternal perspective if we could focus our prayers more in this direction. As we suffer, do we just pray for reprieve from suffering, or do we pray that Christ would return, because that will mean the end to all suffering for those who know Him? As we see injustice, do we just pray for temporary peace or do we also pray that the Lord would come and bring permanent justice through His righteous rule? This picture of the early church challenges me to allow the cry of "maranatha" to transform my prayers and my heart as I wait expectantly for Christ's return.

Saturday, November 26-Sunday, November 27 | 1 Corinthians 13:1-16:24

Reread 1 Corinthians 13:1-16:24 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.