

# 1 CORINTHIANS DEVOTIONAL

By Pastor Phil Emerson

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

## OUR DISCIPLESHIP FLOW

At Emmanuel Church, we are passionate about living out the call to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and make it our goal to see His Kingdom come in our lives and the world in which we live. We recognise that in Biblical times, a disciple was someone who followed a teacher or rabbi, not simply to gain head knowledge to pass an examination, but to be fully immersed in the life of the rabbi, and *learn his ways*, so that they in turn could replicate this to the world around them. As Christians, we are now those who have been invited to ‘follow’ Jesus and all of His ways, and we therefore call ourselves His disciples.

*“This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.” 1 John 2:5,6*

We therefore want to take seriously the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples and also commit to an ongoing journey of teaching and discipleship together.

We all have differing personalities and learning styles. At Emmanuel, we recognise this diversity within the church body and therefore desire to support and journey together as we relate with God and each other in some of the following environments:

- **Public (20+)**

In the Bible, we see Jesus seeking to make disciples as He engaged with larger numbers of people, e.g., His interaction with the crowds (Matthew 4:25; Luke 14:25), and the 72 (Luke 10:1-24).

At Emmanuel, we want to use each of our **larger gathered environments** as an opportunity to make disciples, e.g., **Sunday services, Friday Youth/Kids’** environments, **men’s/women’s** gatherings.

- **Social (10-15)**

Jesus demonstrated the necessity for **smaller accountable relationships** as an essential part of the life of a disciple. He did this by teaching and doing life with his twelve disciples (e.g., Matthew 10).

At Emmanuel, small accountable relationships are offered through:

**Lifegroup 12s**

These are **gatherings of 10-15 people** who meet bi-weekly in homes or around specific interests, e.g., crafts, football.

- **Personal (2-5)**

As well as having smaller accountable relationships amongst His twelve friends, Jesus also seemed to go to even deeper levels of trust with three in particular – Peter, James and John (Matthew 17; Mark 9). At Emmanuel, we seek to do this through:

**Lifegroup 3s**

These are smaller **gatherings of 2-5 people** who are committed to transparent and accountable relationships in order to grow together in following Jesus. The aim for these groups is that after 1-2 years, each person in the group would be able to lead a smaller number of people themselves and replicate the process... **disciples making disciples!**

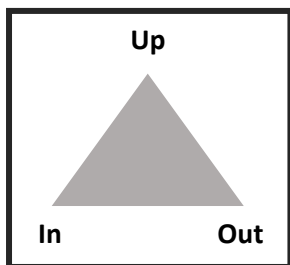
- **Intimate (1-1)**

Jesus regularly withdrew to spend time alone with the Father. This is the ultimate goal of discipleship, that each member of our church family would increasingly spend time alone with the Father and grow in devotion and desire to see the Kingdom come.



## A TOOL TO USE

As stated previously, 1 John 2:6 makes it clear that for those of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus, our goal should be to daily walk in the ways of Jesus, our Rabbi. As we examine the New Testament we see that Jesus lived His life based on three relationships: **Up** – with His Father; **In** – with His chosen followers; **Out** – with the hurting world around Him. This is illustrated in the following triangle:



Jesus taught and modelled out to His disciples how to live into each of these areas in life.

### Up

Jesus frequently left the disciples to spend personal time with the Father (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). He taught them the significance of prayer, and how to pray and communicate with the Father (Luke 11:1-13). When comparisons with one another or insecurities presented themselves, He spoke into it in love and challenged them into a greater depth of living (Mark 9:33-37; Matthew 18:1-5).

### In

Jesus had significant relationships with others in which He intentionally invested (12s and 3s). When He went to engage with the Father He brought the three with Him (Matthew 17:1). He taught them and modelled out the significance of Sabbath and rhythms of rest (Mark 6:31). He demonstrated with His life the significance of generosity and sacrificial love for others (John 13:1-17).

### Out

Jesus personally lived a life that engaged with the crowds and the broken world around Him. He healed the sick (Matthew 8:1-4), fed the poor (Mark 6:30-44), and cast out demons (Matthew 8:28-34). But with the people who were closest to Him, He challenged them to do the same (Mark 6:37), and when they took risks themselves He critiqued and gave honest feedback to call out more for them (Luke 10:17-20).

As we spend time alone or together in this devotional, we want to help and encourage you to engage in each of these ways – UP, IN, and OUT.

# HOW TO USE THE BOOK

## First

If you haven't already done so, please take a second to fill in your name on the inside of the front cover. There'll be a lot of identical books floating around, and we don't want yours to get lost.

## Prepare

Get ready for each session by spending some time to invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you. The Bible is a written word (logos), which becomes a living word (rhema) as the Holy Spirit breathes upon it and speaks directly to our lives through it.

## Commit

Commit to the journey. Discipleship is not a commitment to a moment, but to a lifetime journey. As you personally commit to journeying with God daily, commit to others by sharing what you are learning (possibly in Lifegroup 12s or 3s), and in this way encouraging one another in what God is saying.

## Reflect & Respond

Each day, as you spend personal time with God, we encourage you to ask the following two questions:

- 1) What is God saying to me?
- 2) What am I going to do about it?

**This is how we become doers and not just hearers of what God is saying.**

## INTRODUCTION TO 1 CORINTHIANS

As we begin this book written to the Corinthians, it would be good to read Acts 18:1-18. *"After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth..."*

Here is a little bit of background to the city of Corinth: Corinth is on the southern tip of Greece. It sits on a narrow strip of land with sea on both sides – the Adriatic Sea on one side and the Aegean Sea on the other. Goods from small boats were transported overland across this strip. Larger ships were also unloaded and their goods transported across and re-loaded onto other ships. Corinth was known as a sailor town. It had a population of around 200,000 freemen and 200,000 slaves.

Some of the issues affecting this city were its immorality and idolatry. These were the very things creating problems in this young church. Immorality was overlooked in their ranks, and huge arguments also arose surrounding eating meat offered to idols. Paul definitely had his work cut out for him here, hence he stayed around eighteen months. It is thought that he wrote the books 1 and 2 Thessalonians while he was staying in this city.

So, Bible and journal out, brew your coffee or your green tea, and let's get started. I pray you enjoy.

Phil

## Read

# 1 Corinthians 1

## Live

Paul, accompanied by Sosthenes, addresses this epistle not only to the saints in Corinth but to all saints everywhere. He expresses his thanksgiving to God for the Corinthian saints, for the sufficiency of God's provisions for them, and for the certainty that God will complete what He has begun in them. With this foundation set, Paul talks about unity, taking time in pointing out the ways in which this unity has broken down in the Corinthian church. The conflicts that existed then are still very much with us today. We have conflict and strife in the church, in the home, and at work. Paul points out how these are not biblical and how in Christ, we can allow healing to take place.

I love how Paul begins not with the problem of divisions but with a positive exhortation to maintain Christian unity. He is not exhorting the saints to all agree on every subject. Diversity doesn't naturally mean division; marriage has taught us that. You won't get anything more diverse than a man and a woman and yet they can do okay together (most of the time). Paul calls upon Christians to speak the same thing, which is quite different from agreeing on everything.

When Christians have different convictions, they are not to dispute with one another or to impose personal convictions on others. If God were to achieve His purposes through the worldly wise and powerful, we would be inclined to give praise and glory to the men He has used rather than to Him. But God chooses the opposite – those we expect to fail or, more accurately, those we already deem to be failures – so that when His wisdom and power are evident, there are no wise and powerful men to take their bows. Instead, men must bow before God, giving all the glory to Him. The Bible tells us that we did not choose Him but that He chose us. Let this one thought flood your mind today. Go grab a coffee and meditate on this and then give Him thanks and praise. Why not sing Him a new song of gratitude and love!

## Pray

Father, I thank You that You chose me. I am reminded in Ephesians 1:4 that You chose me before You even laid the earth's foundation. I love You for this and will serve You with the rest of my days. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

## Read

# 1 Corinthians 2

## Live

The Corinthians look upon Paul a bit like a teenager views their parents. Maybe Paul lacked some charm and charisma, and they had begun to listen to others who had a higher level of attraction. Paul was trying to correct their wayward thinking by reminding them that he was the same Paul who came to them at the beginning preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to them. It was through his simple message and methods that the Corinthians became saints and he hasn't changed from how he first led them to saving grace.

I love how Paul tries to get the Corinthians to fathom not human depths but the depths of the Holy Spirit. Just as man's human spirit knows the deep thoughts of the man, so the Holy Spirit knows the intimate things of God. When the Lord Jesus was on the earth, He spoke many things to His disciples that they didn't understand or even remember. Jesus told them that after His departure, He would send His Spirit. The Holy Spirit would not only call the things He had spoken to their remembrance, He would also enable them to understand those truths so that they could be recorded for others. In addition, the Spirit would reveal things to come, things of the coming age.

It seems clear that Paul had divided mankind into two groups: those who trust in the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ for their eternal salvation, and those who do not. There are those who possess the Holy Spirit and therefore have the capacity to understand the Scriptures, and those who do not possess the Holy Spirit and cannot understand the wisdom of God. The wisdom of God seems foolish to unbelievers. They cannot fathom anything which falls within the realm of the Spirit; they are oblivious to the mind of God. The Christian, on the other hand, can say confidently, "I have the mind of Christ." How unbelievably incredible is this! What more could one ask for?

## Pray

Father, I'm still not nearly as free as You intend me to be, even though You've already liberated me from the illusion that I can earn more of Your love by ramping up my obedience. Help me today to remember that I have the mind of Christ – the pure, undiluted, free mind of Christ. In Jesus' name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

## Read

# 1 Corinthians 3

## Live

It is important to remind ourselves that Paul is writing to the church, yes, that's right, to believers. While they had become spiritual, they're just spiritual babies. When someone first becomes a Christian, they're limited in their understanding and need to be fed on milk, but over the course of time, they grow and begin to eat meat. We start with the bare bones of our doctrines but we are to grow into maturity – into godly living, denying the flesh, crucifying self, living righteously, and forsaking evil. The problem was these Corinthians were spiritually still in nappies, they had never weaned off milk and onto solid food. You might wonder, is there some kind of Christian measuring stick that checks growth? Absolutely! It is behaviour. In the Corinthians we see jealousy, strife, and division, just like toddlers fighting over a toy. Paul goes further and addresses the issue they're fighting over – what man they each want to follow – Paul or Apollos or Peter, to which Paul says, "Stop following us. We are just men doing the work of the ministry! We're just servants all working in the same field, but it's God causing the growth, and if you follow anybody, it should be Him!"

We, the Church, are God's building and God's workers, His servants building on the foundation which is Jesus Christ. One of the most important things to adhere to when building a structure is to follow the fire codes. What am I making this building out of? Is it flammable? Am I building with wood, hay and straw? If I am, this structure is going to burn as soon as someone puts a match to it. But if I make it out of gold, silver, and precious stones, it will be thoroughly fireproof. How about you and me today? Is it wood, hay, and stubble? Or is it gold, silver, and precious stones? As we hear these teachings from the Bible, are we appropriating and applying them to our lives? If we are, we can be sure that we're building a fireproof structure that will last for eternity.

## Pray

Father, today I declare my desire for the meat of Your Word and for the meat of Your presence. From this moment on I declare that nothing less will do. No more milk for me! I want to grow up in You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.



**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

## Read

# 1 Corinthians 4

## Live

From the first three chapters, we have seen how there were groups following one of the apostles: Paul, Apollos, or Peter. I hope we have concluded that the apostles themselves were not the problem. They were not competing with one another for positions of power and prominence. Paul uses three Greek terms for *servant* in reference to himself and the other apostles. In verse 5, *diakonos*, a common term for servant, refers to the office of deacon. The term for servant in verse 1 is *hyperetes* which refers to a slave who was seated under the deck of a ship and was one of a number of rowers. It is not a position of status, and therefore Paul uses this term to emphasise the humble service of the apostles. The third term, *oikonomos*, is rendered *steward*. The steward was also a slave, but one given a higher authority under his master.

The Corinthians must take their leaders off the pedestal on which they had placed them. Even apostles are mere men who have been chosen and appointed by God to be His servants, and to whom He has given authority to serve as “*stewards of the mysteries of God*”. These words are pregnant with meaning. The apostles are servants and servants do not own things; they are owned by their Master. Paul paints a picture of the Corinthians sitting “*on high*” looking down from their lofty heights disdaining the apostles who are a shame and a reproach to them. Paul’s words are a dramatic contrast to this kind of leadership. He does not seek to shame them or put a guilt trip on them. But if there is no repentance, if those who oppose him persist, Paul will come in power, and he will then use his apostolic authority to deal with them. Lesson to be heeded: let’s not think too highly of ourselves today!

## Pray

Father, resentment and bitterness are a contradiction and blatant misrepresentation of who You are and how You relate to us in Jesus. For if anyone has a right to hold a grudge, to keep a record of wrongs done, to rehearse and remember our sins against us, it is You, and yet Your steadfast love never comes to an end, Your mercies are new every morning. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

## Read

# 1 Corinthians 5

## Live

The church at Corinth is a bit of a mess, to say the least. Numbers seem to be growing but they are unaware of the cancer within. This chapter is not so much about the immorality of one church member as it is about the passivity of the entire church in response to this person's sin. Here we see the obligation of the church to exercise discipline. I'm sure there were other cases of immorality in the church, but the specific situation Paul refers to is where a son has taken his father's wife. Paul gives us the imagery of leaven and how a little bit of it can change the whole lump of dough, making it rise. If this man is allowed to remain in the fellowship of the saints at Corinth, he will contaminate the entire church, just as Achan did to the entire nation of Israel (see Joshua 7). By removing this man from their midst, the church at Corinth would seek to restore him but also promote their own purity.

It is interesting that this is not the first letter Paul has written to the Corinthians. He indicates in verse 9 that he had previously written to them on the subject of separation. In that first letter, he instructed them to not associate with immoral people. Paul does not mean for the Corinthians to keep the church out of the world, but to keep the world out of the church. He means that those who are saved must live like that. The Corinthians are not to associate with a person who claims to be a Christian but continues to live in sin. Some may ask, 'Is church discipline a form of judging others?' Call it what you may, but it is not only permitted, it is *required* by church leadership. The bottom line for the Corinthians is that they must put this immoral man out of their church.

## Pray

Father, I totally understand why You warned us against setting our hearts on the wrong treasure, especially when I'm feeling vulnerable. When threatened, I often look to the wrong things and wrong people for safety and security. But I've lived long enough to see what happens when we choose anything or anyone besides You as our ultimate treasure. Keep my heart totally fixed on You and keep my life from sin. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

## Read

# 1 Corinthians 6

## Live

In the first 11 verses, Paul addresses the sinful divisions of the Corinthian saints which have made their way into public view in the civil courts. Paul seeks to show the Corinthians the “higher road” of morality, which comes not from civil laws but from the gospel. Paul is distressed about these things for several reasons. First, disputes are erupting between believers in the church. Second, these disputes are being taken to the secular courts. Third, when these disputes are taken before unbelieving judges, the world gets to watch these Christians fight with one another in court. Fourth, these disputes have not been taken to the church where they belong. Paul assumes they should know all this. Their actions are completely contradictory to their theology. If these saints are going to reign with Christ and participate in the judgment of the world, how can they turn to the unsaved for judgment on their disputes? If the righteous will judge the unrighteous at the Second Coming, how can the Corinthian Christians now be looking to a heathen to judge the righteous? Paul makes a most troubling announcement: any Corinthian Christian who takes another believer to court has already lost. Going to court with a fellow believer is a no-win situation. The better way is to take the loss.

Paul then shows how the sexual dimension of our makeup is to be exercised only within the realm of marriage. We are to symbolically represent the union of Christ and His Church. Sex has a holy function to be carried out only in the context of marriage. When we trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins and for eternal life, we are united with Christ. Paul finishes this chapter by stating that each of us must, *“Therefore glorify God in your body.”* Consequently, sexual immorality is not an option. If we are to live in a manner consistent with our calling, we must flee immorality.

## Pray

Father, the more I know You, the more You challenge and change the way I think about everything. It’s another clear example of Your commitment to complete the good work You’ve begun in me. I praise You for the perfection of Your plan and the persistence of Your heart. Help me today and always to *therefore glorify You in my body*. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

## Read

# 1 Corinthians 7

## Live

Paul turns his attention to those who seem to regard all sex as dirty. Prostitution was an essential part of Greek life. The Roman sexual ethic was no better. At the time of Paul, Roman family life was wrecked. Seneca writes that women were married to be divorced and divorced to be married. One would hope the Jews would be an example in matters of sex and marriage, but this was simply not the case. Paul's words concerning sex and marriage were desperately needed in his day and no less needed in our own day. Let us look to the finest sex education available to us, a word from God on sex and marriage through the Apostle Paul.

Paul gently seeks to show the Corinthians the error of their thinking and conduct. When Paul speaks of sexual abstinence and celibacy, he does so in a very carefully defined manner. Nowhere else in the Bible is celibacy identified as a spiritual gift. Whether one chooses to marry or remain single should be determined by how that person's gift and calling can best be fulfilled. For some, this will mean marriage and all that comes with it, like the pleasures and responsibilities of sex. For others, it may mean celibacy with the freedom and undistracted life that comes with it.

However, the single life and sexual abstinence is not the rule, as Paul knows. And so, we find Paul speaking of the role of sex in marriage. For Christians who marry, God's plan is for them to enjoy regular sexual relations. A healthy and pleasurable sex life between a husband and wife is normal and natural, and helpful in the preventing of sexual immorality. Neither the husband nor the wife has the authority to deprive their mate sexually. There is nothing spiritual about avoiding sex. I should also say that there is nothing particularly spiritual about demanding sex either. Those who are married should consider themselves bound to that partner until death separates them.

## Pray

Father, I'm so grateful for the good friends You've woven into my life. Help me accept people without bending to anyone else's foolishness. Help me to stay pure sexually and help me stay vigilant in preaching the gospel to my own heart daily, and to others regularly. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.



**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

## Read

# 1 Corinthians 8

## Live

There was an ancient heresy known as Gnosticism that plagued the early Church. Gnostics had a dualistic approach to faith that allowed them to do whatever they wanted. They also prided themselves in possessing a secret knowledge. This knowledge was not found in Scripture but outside biblical revelation and was handed down by word of mouth to those 'in the know'. Paul denies that there was any such knowledge outside of the Scriptures that was known by the spiritually elite. It is worthy to note that even true knowledge, when wrongly interpreted or applied, can puff up the pride of the knower, while genuine love places others ahead of self and seeks to build them up. Our knowledge in this life is partial, and even that which has been revealed by God is never perfectly grasped. Over-confidence is often an indication of ignorance, while humility is the true wisdom of knowledge.

If there is but one God, and all Christians know this to be true, then there are no other gods. Idols are symbols or representations of these non-gods. If idols are nothing, then the foods offered to them are of no significance either. In verses 11 and 12, Paul shows that in our self-indulgence the weaker brother is not edified; he is caused to stumble. Insisting on my right to eat idol-offered meat may cause a fellow saint to stumble, and in causing this, I find myself working against everything Christ stands for. I am therefore not only sinning against my weaker brother, I am sinning against my Lord and obviously this is a more serious offense. In verse 13, Paul shows us that no liberty should ever be exercised when it acts contrary to love. No liberty of mine should be a spiritual hindrance to my brother or sister in Christ. If I love my brother and sister, I will gladly forego any liberty which will cause them to stumble. This is true Christianity in action!

## Pray

Father, continue to free me from doing anything for the approval of people, out of fear of people, or to gain power over people. Free me to do all things as unto You: loving my spouse or friends without manipulation, doing my job without self-congratulation, and serving Your people without unrealistic expectations, to name a few. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

## Read

# 1 Corinthians 9

## Live

Paul first sets out to prove that he is, without a doubt, an apostle and he has the right to be provided for by those to whom he ministers. Then he explains why he has chosen to refuse this right, at great personal cost. Because of the simplicity of Paul's message and his method of delivery, it seems some were seeking leadership from others who had a more popular method and message. They also questioned Paul's apostolic authority because he didn't charge for his services. If anyone should be convinced of Paul's apostleship, it should have been the Corinthians. They were the fruit of his apostolic labours. He was the one who came sowing the seeds of the gospel and saw these people won for Christ in the first place.

Paul turns the Corinthians' attention to three occupations where the worker labours with the expectation of eating or drinking from the fruit of their labour. The soldier doesn't have time to produce his own rations and so they are provided for him. The keeper of the vineyard expects to eat some of the grapes and drink some of the wine he has laboured to produce. The shepherd tends the flock with the expectation that he can drink of the milk of the flock. In every case, the labourer expects to receive some of the fruits of their labour. However, Paul's work as a tent-maker put him in touch with the lost and meant he could support needy people and causes himself.

The thing that sets a winning athlete apart from the rest is self-control. This self-control is not simply evident in the race, nor is it restricted only to the realm of athletics; it is seen in their rest, eating, and working habits. Actually, every aspect of the athlete's life is disciplined, so that he or she may win the prize. As believers, we should strive to win an eternal, unfading crown while asking ourselves, how much more effort and sacrifice should we be willing to make in order to win so great a crown?

## Pray

Father, until You return, I know that Satan will continue to mount an all-out assault against You by attacking Your bride, especially those called to prepare Your Church for the great wedding day. God, would You help me to be more in touch with You, and use me to encourage others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

## Read

# 1 Corinthians 10

## Live

Here we read of Christ, the Rock, who was the source of water to a thirsty, dry people in the wilderness. Paul wants us to know that Christ was ever present with His people in their wilderness wanderings. God supernaturally provided for all of the true needs of the Israelites during their forty years in the wilderness. He divinely provided for their salvation, for their protection, and for their guidance. Yet, in spite of all these divine provisions, the Israelites failed to enter into the land. Only two of all those wilderness wanderers ever entered Canaan; even Moses was not permitted to enter. What Paul is pointing out is that divine blessings and privileges do not guarantee that one will “*win the race*”.

No one can ever say that they failed to finish the race because they were not adequately provided for. Those who failed to enter into the Promised Land were those who lacked self-discipline and fell due to their self-indulgence. It was not that they lacked food to eat, for God provided for their bodily needs. They grumbled because they found God’s provisions unsavoury. They wanted something tastier and came to despise God’s provisions, longingly looking back to the days of their slavery as though they were the good old days. The unbridled craving and fleshly desires of the Israelites which they sought to satisfy led to their death in the wilderness. Self-discipline would have enabled them to finish their course, to win the race.

In each of the instances of Israel’s sin there was a dire consequence of divine judgment. When we lose sight of the shortness of the time and the fact that we live in the end times, we become sloppy. This is the very thing the Lord warned against. Be very careful to note here that God never promises us that we cannot fall, but rather He encourages us that we need not fall.

## Pray

Father, the further I go into the gospel, the more You challenge and change the way I think about everything. It’s another clear and kind example of Your commitment to complete the good work You’ve begun in Your sons and daughters. At times, this process is quite painful, but it’s always about more glory for You and more Christlikeness in us. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

## Read

# 1 Corinthians 11

## Live

This passage about head coverings has caused divisions and great strife in many churches. Many people have disregarded it and don't try to find any way in which to apply it to their own lives because of the controversy that comes with it. We must remember, however, that as Christians, we are responsible for the whole message of God. Paul begins in the first two verses by exhorting the Corinthians to imitate him as he imitates Christ. He then continues in verse three with a discussion of authority and the symbols of it. We must always remember that as we commune with each other, we symbolise that we all, together, constitute the body of Christ, and that we are all equal in the saving work of Christ. It's not only about our unity but our equality. We are all one body, and we all have equal standing in that body. It is by virtue of Christ's work at Calvary that we are saved. No one is more saved or less saved than anyone else in the body of Christ.

To recapture the meaning of the Lord's Supper as it was first instituted by Jesus, Paul takes these Corinthians back to the original Lord's Supper, as he received this tradition from the Lord. If the Corinthians are to practise the Lord's Supper as Jesus meant it to be, they must be reminded of that first Supper which Jesus celebrated with His disciples shortly before His death. We can totally understand why Jesus warned us against setting our hearts on the wrong treasure, especially when we are feeling vulnerable. When threatened, we often look to the wrong things and wrong people for safety, stability, and security. I'm sure we have all lived long enough to know what happens when we choose anything or anyone besides God as our ultimate treasure. There are all kinds of wear and tear and thieves and moths that diminish and destroy the temporal things and temporal places, but nothing, absolutely nothing, threatens God and His everlasting kingdom.

## Pray

Father, right in the middle of my chaos and confusion, I reaffirm that Your Son, Jesus, is my priceless treasure and most to be desired inheritance. Because of Him I can call You "Abba, Father" with the new heaven and new earth my inheritance forever. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.



**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

## Read

# 1 Corinthians 12

## Live

Over the next three chapters, God wants to give us a good working knowledge of the spiritual gifts. There are three things we can do with these gifts: use, abuse, or refuse them. It is evident from verse 1 that God really wants us to think about them. In verse 7, Paul says these gifts are given for the benefit of serving the Church and community. The world desperately needs us to understand, properly covet and use these gifts, and not be afraid of the workings of the Spirit. Paul lists the first gift, 'wisdom', which is not intelligence nor is it knowledge. Knowledge is the accumulation of facts; wisdom is the ability to properly use those facts. 'Distinguishing of spirits' is the working of the Spirit to see that something is not right about an individual.

None of us are the body of Christ by ourselves; we're only a part of the body of Christ. None of us can effectively live alone; we need to be part of the body. We're baptised into the body by the Holy Spirit. Physical baptism in water is only an outward sign symbolising what the Holy Spirit has and is doing in a person. The body has many different members, each to fulfil a function within the body. These parts are not designed to survive on their own. When we work alone, we can't experience all the spiritual gifts, hence Paul's question, 'Do all possess the same gifts?' Of course, the answer is an emphatic NO!

Right in the middle of Paul's description of the spiritual gifts he gives us the next chapter – 1 Corinthians 13, speaking of the best gift we ALL can have acting within us. "*But eagerly desire the greater gifts,*" Paul says at the end of chapter 12. What greater gifts? He is about to describe a greater gift, one you can never over excess in – love!

## Pray

Father, I want to be a person who loves You simply because You are God, worshipping You when life's easy or life's hard, when You're showing up or remaining silent, when You answer my prayers or rattle my cage. I'm very grateful for Your gifts, but I want to love and worship You, the Giver, as the treasure of my heart and gold of my soul. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

**Live**

I often wondered why Paul, obviously inspired by the Holy Spirit, popped this chapter right smack in the middle of his rundown on the spiritual gifts. My conclusion is that Paul is giving a people who seemed to over excess in the gifts in order to look good something you can't over excess in – love. The word for *love* here is the Greek word *agape*, a godly love that only comes from one source. It is a spiritual gift from above, just as the other gifts mentioned in the previous chapter are from above. God's *agape* love always gives and never expects anything in return. Paul says that no matter how great a work we may work, it is nothing without *agape* love. Speaking in tongues is nothing without *agape* love; it's just making a noise, that's all.

When all is said and done in God's plan for mankind, what will be left? Love is permanent; all else will fail. There will be a time when Jesus returns and there will be no need for prophecy, tongues, or any of the other gifts, but love will abide. The conclusion of the chapter shows that love itself includes faith and hope; that is why these three never fail. Faith and hope are for the future; love is for today and always.

Sometimes a church can come together with a lot of noise and excitement but it's hollow without God's *agape* love. People need to learn to have true compassion. You can love the ministry and hate people. Paul says you may be used to moving mountains or teaching all kinds of Bible knowledge, but without *agape* love it's nothing. We run the race for eternal glory, but the secret in doing that is *agape* love, more than any manifestation of the spiritual gifts. What is the main difference between Christianity and other religions? *Agape* love is the difference. Even our financial sacrifices without *agape* love profit us nothing.

**Pray**

Father, as my heart comes more fully alive to how You have loved me, I'll seek to make fewer excuses for loving poorly and to offer quicker repentances when I do. As You continue to show me the full extent of Your love for me, love *through* me more fully so I can spill it out onto others for Your glory. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

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## Read

# 1 Corinthians 14

## Live

Today we continue seeing that everything is to be done decently and in order. The emphasis is on prophecy rather than on tongues. Paul gives four major guidelines about these two gifts. The gift of prophecy (or prophesying) is very desirable in a corporate setting. The gift of tongues without interpretation in a corporate setting is not acceptable. The gift of tongues with interpretation in a corporate setting is okay. Tongues are to be desired in our private prayer time with God.

The gift of prophecy is desirable because it is clear and understandable. Prophesying equips, exhorts, warns and comforts and is greater than the gift of tongues because it edifies the whole church. Tongues edify one person and are basically for the non-believer. It was tongues that drew people to the apostles and Peter on the first day of Pentecost when 3,000 non-believers were brought to repentance. Tongues are a foreign language, either another language on earth or a heavenly language.

In Corinth, they were way out of balance in the use of these spiritual gifts. Paul lays down the rules of balance here in this chapter. As the thirteenth chapter showed, the first and primary purpose we have as Christians is to love others and manifest God's *agape* love. To use the spiritual gifts for any other purpose is a misuse of them. Paul lays out similar rules for prophesying when he guides two or three prophets to speak. The emphasis is to maintain order with one speaking at a time, while all others judge. God is not the author of confusion, so don't hog the mike; this isn't about you. Prophecy honours Jesus as the Son of God, so if there's not a spirit of humility, watch out. My two rules of thumb to live by in prophecy are: Does it line up with the Word of God? And does it bring peace?

## Pray

Father, by the power of the gospel, help me to keep in mind the things concerning You. May Your cross get bigger and bigger to me and may my boast in it grow louder and louder. Jesus, You're the only hero in the Bible, and I'm more than fine with that. We matter, but You alone are the point. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

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**Live**

This chapter is known as the resurrection chapter. Let's jump right in. The gospel of salvation is a message of how we are to receive eternal life. Paul says that if you're not holding fast to the gospel message, you're not saved. I love how he explains it so clearly: Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures; He was buried for three days and three nights; on the third day He rose triumphantly, conquering death and hell.

Paul tells us that history validates the resurrection of Jesus Christ as there were many eye witness accounts. Remember that Paul is addressing a problem caused by some people who had come into the church teaching there was no resurrection of the dead, similar to the teaching of the Sadducees. Paul brings out three basic points to counter this false teaching that there was no resurrection of the dead. Firstly, if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, our preaching and our faith is useless. If this is so, we're false teachers and stupid for what we're doing. Secondly, if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, we are still in our sins. And thirdly, those who have died in the Lord are lost if there's no resurrection of the dead.

I love how Paul begins to explain, in the best terms he can, the resurrection to immortality. In going from our physical bodies to spirit bodies, he urges us to look at seeds and how they are dead in appearance yet germinate and grow into a beautiful plant. Nature is full of these patterns which point to a greater glory for man. Paul also points us to the glory of the heavens.

What an amazing insight into the resurrected body of Christ. My prayer for you today is that you will lift your eyes from the temporal and begin to allow glimpses of eternity to awaken your soul. You will be forever with the One who died for you. Now that should put a spring in your step today.

**Pray**

Father, may my standing on Your promises lead to living under Your authority and serving well in Your Kingdom until Your Son and my Saviour, Jesus, returns to finish making all things new. I pray in Jesus' strong name. Amen.



**REFLECT**

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## Read

# 1 Corinthians 16

## Live

Paul was not reluctant to talk about money nor was he reluctant to ask for it. He waived his right to be supported financially by those to whom he ministered, preaching the gospel at no cost so it might not be hindered. When Paul came to Corinth, he worked as a tentmaker along with Aquila, and when he finally ministered full-time to the Corinthians, it was because of the financial support he received from the Macedonians (see Acts 18). Paul purposed not to be a burden to the churches where he served by requiring them to support him. No wonder Paul can now speak to his readers about making a contribution to the poor. This is one of the sure ways the Christian can “*lay up treasure in heaven*”. How we handle money as a stewardship determines how much responsibility we will be given in the really important things.

There are two things that I love about the verses concerning Timothy and Apollos. The first is the strong sense of unity and cooperation between Paul, Apollos, Timothy, and others. This is in contrast to the striving and competition which existed among leaders and followers in Corinth. The second thing that I love about Paul’s reference to Apollos is his respect for other Christian leaders. These saints in Corinth were obviously lacking in love – toward God and toward men. If you wanted to sum up the whole epistle, verse 14 is it: “*Let everything be done in love.*” Love would not have allowed them to get into the state they were now in. The church at Corinth was divided and one of the principle reasons was because of its leaders. We believe in plurality of leadership, but not like the multiple leaders at Corinth; there, each leader had his or her own little following. The church should be led by a plurality of leaders, but they should operate in unity and harmony, governing the whole church and not little segments of it.

## Pray

Father, it is so easy to set my sights on the wrong things. It’s so easy to get pulled into a society that is consumeristic and shallow. I want to invest my life now into the things that will stand the test of fire. Therefore, from this day on, I want to lay up treasure in heaven. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

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