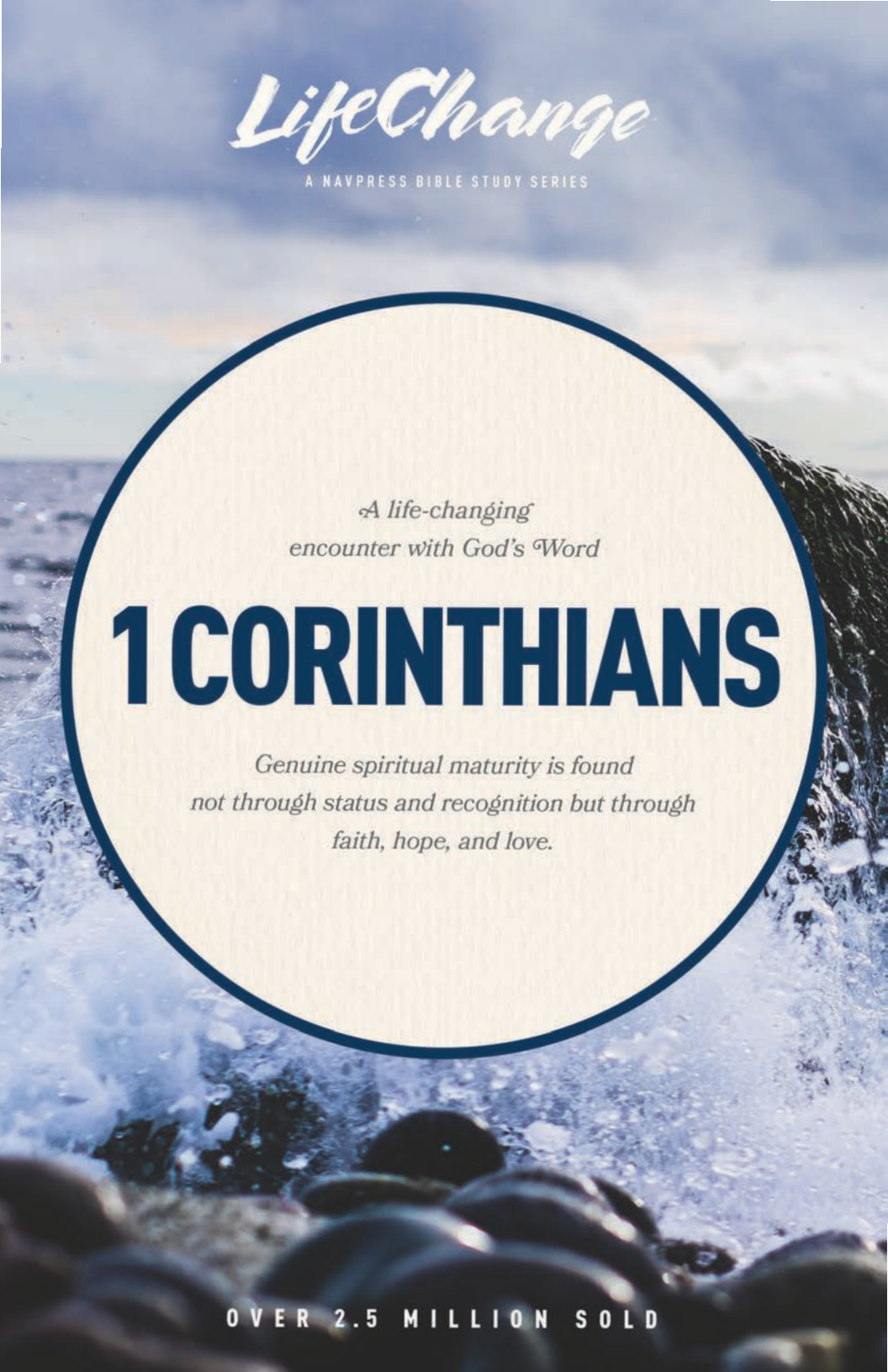




LifeChange

A NAVPRESS BIBLE STUDY SERIES

*A life-changing
encounter with God's Word*

1 CORINTHIANS

*Genuine spiritual maturity is found
not through status and recognition but through
faith, hope, and love.*

OVER 2.5 MILLION SOLD

LifeChange

A NAVPRESS BIBLE STUDY SERIES

*A life-changing
encounter with God's Word*

1 CORINTHIANS

*Genuine spiritual maturity is found
not through status and recognition but through
faith, hope, and love.*

NAVPRESS 

A NavPress resource published in alliance
with Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.



NavPress is the publishing ministry of The Navigators, an international Christian organization and leader in personal spiritual development. NavPress is committed to helping people grow spiritually and enjoy lives of meaning and hope through personal and group resources that are biblically rooted, culturally relevant, and highly practical.

For more information, visit www.NavPress.com.

1 Corinthians

Copyright © 1990, 2014 by The Navigators. All rights reserved.

A NavPress resource published in alliance with Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

NAV PRESS and the NAV PRESS logo are registered trademarks of NavPress, The Navigators, Colorado Springs, CO. TYNDALE is a registered trademark of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. Absence of ® in connection with marks of NavPress or other parties does not indicate an absence of registration of those marks.

Cover photograph of rock waves copyright © Andreas Ronningen/Unsplash.com. All rights reserved.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, *New International Version*,® NIV.® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible,® copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. Scripture quotations marked RSV are taken from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1952 [2nd edition, 1971] by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture verses marked PH are taken from *The New Testament in Modern English*, copyright © J. B. Phillips, 1958, 1959, 1960, 1972. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked KJV are taken from the *Holy Bible*, King James Version.

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Tyndale House Publishers at csresponse@tyndale.com, or call 1-800-323-9400.

ISBN 978-0-89109-559-0

Printed in the United States of America

23 22 21 20 19 18 17
31 30 29 28 27 26 25

CONTENTS

How to Use This Study	5
One—Paul and Corinth (Overview)	9
Map for 1 Corinthians	9
Timeline of Paul's Ministry	11
Two—To the Called (1:1-9)	21
Three—Foolishness (1:10–2:5)	31
Four—True Wisdom (2:6-16)	39
Five—Fleshly and Spiritual Attitudes (3:1-23)	47
Six—Apostles of Christ (4:1-21)	55
Seven—Dealing with Immorality (5:1-13)	63
Eight—More Moral Laxity (6:1-20)	71
Nine—Marriage (7:1-40)	79
Ten—Freedom and Rights (8:1–9:27)	87
Eleven—Freedom and Temptation (10:1–11:1)	97
Twelve—Propriety in Worship (11:2-34)	109
Thirteen—Gifts of the Spirit: 1 (12:1-31)	119
Fourteen—Gifts of the Spirit: 2 (13:1–14:40)	129
Fifteen—Resurrection: 1 (15:1-34)	139
Sixteen—Resurrection: 2 (15:35-58)	147
Seventeen—Personal Words (16:1-24 and Review)	155
Study Aids	165

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The LIFECHANGE series has been produced through the coordinated efforts of a team of Navigator Bible study developers and NavPress editorial staff, along with a nationwide network of field-testers.

SERIES EDITOR: KAREN LEE-THORP

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Objectives

Most guides in the LIFECHANGE series of Bible studies cover one book of the Bible. Although the LIFECHANGE guides vary with the books they explore, they share some common goals:

1. To provide you with a firm foundation of understanding and a thirst to return to the book.
2. To teach you by example how to study a book of the Bible without structured guides.
3. To give you all the historical background, word definitions, and explanatory notes you need, so that your only other reference is the Bible.
4. To help you grasp the message of the book as a whole.
5. To teach you how to let God's Word transform you into Christ's image.

Each lesson in this study is designed to take sixty to ninety minutes to complete on your own. The guide is based on the assumption that you are completing one lesson per week, but if time is limited you can do half a lesson per week or whatever amount allows you to be thorough.

Flexibility

LIFECHANGE guides are flexible, allowing you to adjust the quantity and depth of your study to meet your individual needs. The guide offers many optional questions in addition to the regular numbered questions. The optional questions, which appear in the margins of the study pages, include the following:

Optional Application. Nearly all application questions are optional; we hope you will do as many as you can without overcommitting yourself.

For Thought and Discussion. Beginning Bible students should be able to handle these, but even advanced students need to think about them. These questions frequently deal with ethical issues and other biblical principles. They often offer cross-references to spark thought, but the references do not give obvious answers. They are good for group discussions.

For Further Study. These include: (a) cross-references that shed light on a topic the book discusses, and (b) questions that delve deeper into the passage. You can omit them to shorten a lesson without missing a major point of the passage.

If you are meeting in a group, decide together which optional questions to prepare for each lesson, and how much of the lesson you will cover at the next meeting. Normally, the group leader should make this decision, but you might let each member choose his or her own application questions.

As you grow in your walk with God, you will find the LIFECHANGE guide growing with you—a helpful reference on a topic, a continuing challenge for application, a source of questions for many levels of growth.

Overview and details

The study begins with an overview of 1 Corinthians. The key to interpretation is context—what is the whole passage or book *about*?—and the key to context is purpose—what is the author’s *aim* for the whole work? In lesson 1 you will lay the foundation for your study of 1 Corinthians by asking yourself, “Why did the author (and God) write the book? What did they want to accomplish? What is the book about?”

In lessons 2 through 16, you will analyze successive passages of 1 Corinthians in detail. Thinking about how a paragraph fits into the overall goal of the book will help you to see its purpose. Its purpose will help you see its meaning. Frequently reviewing a chart or outline of the book will enable you to make these connections.

In lesson 17, you will review 1 Corinthians, returning to the big picture to see whether your view of it has changed after closer study. Review will also strengthen your grasp of major issues and give you an idea of how you have grown from your study.

Kinds of questions

Bible study on your own—without a structured guide—follows a progression. First you observe: What does the passage *say*? Then you interpret: What does the passage *mean*? Lastly you apply: How does this truth *affect* my life?

Some of the “how” and “why” questions will take some creative thinking, even prayer, to answer. Some are opinion questions without clear-cut right answers; these will lend themselves to discussions and side studies.

Don’t let your study become an exercise in knowledge alone. Treat the passage as God’s Word, and stay in dialogue with Him as you study. Pray,

“Lord, what do You want me to see here?” “Father, why is this true?” “Lord, how does this apply to my life?”

It is important that you write down your answers. The act of writing clarifies your thinking and helps you to remember.

Study aids

A list of reference materials, including a few notes of explanation to help you make good use of them, begins on page 165. This guide is designed to include enough background to let you interpret with just your Bible and the guide. Still, if you want more information on a subject or want to study a book on your own, try the references listed.

Scripture versions

Unless otherwise indicated, the Bible quotations in this guide are from the New International Version of the Bible. The other version cited is the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

Use any translation you like for study, preferably more than one. A paraphrase such as *The Living Bible* is not accurate enough for study, but it can be helpful for comparison or devotional reading.

Memorizing and meditating

A psalmist wrote, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11). If you write down a verse or passage that challenges or encourages you and reflect on it often for a week or more, you will find it beginning to affect your motives and actions. We forget quickly what we read once; we remember what we ponder.

When you find a significant verse or passage, you might copy it onto a card to keep with you. Set aside five minutes during each day just to think about what the passage might mean in your life. Recite it over to yourself, exploring its meaning. Then, return to your passage as often as you can during your day, for a brief review. You will soon find it coming to mind spontaneously.

For group study

A group of four to ten people allows the richest discussions, but you can adapt this guide for other sized groups. It will suit a wide range of group types, such as home Bible studies, growth groups, youth groups, and businessmen’s studies. Both new and experienced Bible students, and new and mature Christians, will benefit from the guide. You can omit or leave for later years any questions you find too easy or too hard.

The guide is intended to lead a group through one lesson per week. However, feel free to split lessons if you want to discuss them more thoroughly. Or, omit some questions in a lesson if preparation or discussion time is limited. You can always return to this guide for personal study later. You will be able to discuss only a few questions at length, so choose some for discussion and others for background. Make time at each discussion for members to ask about anything they didn't understand.

Each lesson in the guide ends with a section called "For the group." These sections give advice on how to focus a discussion, how you might apply the lesson in your group, how you might shorten a lesson, and so on. The group leader should read each "For the group" at least a week ahead so that he or she can tell the group how to prepare for the next lesson.

Each member should prepare for a meeting by writing answers for all of the background and discussion questions to be covered. If the group decides not to take an hour per week for private preparation, then expect to take at least two meetings per lesson to work through the questions. Application will be very difficult, however, without private thought and prayer.

Two reasons for studying in a group are accountability and support. When each member commits in front of the rest to seek growth in an area of life, you can pray with one another, listen jointly for God's guidance, help one another to resist temptation, assure each other that the other's growth matters to you, use the group to practice spiritual principles, and so on. Pray about one another's commitments and needs at most meetings. Spend the first few minutes of each meeting sharing any results from applications prompted by previous lessons. Then discuss new applications toward the end of the meeting. Follow such sharing with prayer for these and other needs.

If you write down each other's applications and prayer requests, you are more likely to remember to pray for them during the week, ask about them at the next meeting, and notice answered prayers. You might want to get a notebook for prayer requests and discussion notes.

Notes taken during discussion will help you to remember, follow up on ideas, stay on the subject, and clarify a total view of an issue. But don't let note-taking keep you from participating. Some groups choose one member at each meeting to take notes. Then someone copies the notes and distributes them at the next meeting. Rotating these tasks can help include people. Some groups have someone take notes on a large pad of paper or erasable marker board so that everyone can see what has been recorded.

Pages 167–168 list some good sources of counsel for leading group studies.

OVERVIEW

Paul and Corinth

Map for 1 Corinthians



Founding the church in Corinth had been no easy matter for Paul, and maintaining it was proving to be just as challenging. He had planted the faith in the pagan soil of a bustling port city, and weeds persistently threatened to choke it. From Paul's correspondence with the Corinthian believers, we see how he applied the gospel to a host of issues, including sex, intellectualism, public worship, and gifts of the Spirit.

Saul the Pharisee

Some knowledge of Paul's background helps us understand his views on the issues being debated in Corinth. He was born in the first decade AD in Tarsus, a prosperous city on the trade route from Syria to Asia Minor. Tarsus was known for its schools of philosophy and liberal arts, and some scholars believe that Paul must have had some contact with these. Like most cities in the Roman Empire, Tarsus probably contained synagogues of Greek-speaking Jews who were often as devout as their Hebrew-speaking brethren.¹

However, Paul called himself "a Hebrew of Hebrews" (Philippians 3:5), which probably means that his parents spoke Hebrew and raised him in a strict Jewish home, isolated as much as possible from the pagan city around them.² They named their boy "Saul" after Israel's first king, the most glorious member of the tribe of Benjamin, to which Saul's parents traced their ancestry (see Philippians 3:5). It was a rare Jew outside Palestine who could trace a pure lineage back to the ancient days of Israel, and fellow Jews would have envied the pedigree. Furthermore, Saul's family must have owned property and had some importance in the Gentile community as well, for Saul was born not only a citizen of Tarsus (see Acts 21:39) but also of Rome (see Acts 22:27-28).³

Saul's parents had such aspirations that they sent their son to study Jewish Law in Jerusalem under the foremost rabbi of the day, the Pharisee Gamaliel (see Acts 22:3; Galatians 1:14). With Gamaliel, Saul learned a little about Greek rhetoric and oratory, and a lot about Jewish reasoning, arguing, and the Law. The Pharisees (the Hebrew word means "the separated ones") felt that God had set them apart to live by the *Torah* (the Law or Teaching of Moses). For them, this meant following the interpretations of the *Torah* laid down by generations of teachers. Some Pharisees held that a man was righteous if he had done more good than bad, but Saul apparently followed the stricter group who insisted that even the least implications of the Law must be kept.⁴

The Pharisees expected a *Messiah* (Hebrew for "Anointed One"; Greek: *Christ*) who would deliver them from oppression and rule with justice. However, Jesus of Nazareth had infuriated many Pharisees by interpreting the *Torah* differently and claiming a special relationship with God. Thus, when some Jews began to proclaim Jesus as Messiah and Lord (Lord was a term usually reserved for God), strict Pharisees opposed them vehemently.

Saul helped lead the fight against the proclaimers of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem (see Acts 7:58–8:3; Galatians 1:13). When some followers of Christ were driven out, Saul obtained permission to pursue them to Damascus. But on the way there, Jesus confronted Saul in a blinding encounter (see Acts 9:1-19), revealing to Saul that he was persecuting the very God he professed to worship. From then on, Saul's understanding of God and the *Torah* began to change dramatically. He joined those Jews who were urging other Jews to believe in Jesus, and after some years God called him to proclaim Jesus as Savior to the Gentiles also. Saul took the Greek name "Paul" when he turned to work among Gentiles.

Timeline of Paul's Ministry

(All dates are approximate, based on F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, page 475.)

Public ministry of Jesus	AD 28–30
Conversion of Paul (Acts 9:1-19)	33
Paul visits Jerusalem to see Peter (Galatians 1:18)	35
Paul in Cilicia and Syria (Acts 9:30; Galatians 1:21)	35–46
Paul visits Jerusalem to clarify the mission to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:1-10)	46
Paul and Barnabas in Cyprus and Galatia (Acts 13–14)	47–48
<i>Letter to the Galatians</i>	48?
Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15)	49
Paul and Silas travel from Antioch to Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Achaia (Acts 16–17)	49–50
<i>Letters to the Thessalonians</i>	50
Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:1-18)	50–52
Paul visits Jerusalem	52
Paul in Ephesus (Acts 19)	52–55
<i>Letters to the Corinthians</i>	55–56
Paul travels to Macedonia, Dalmatia, and Achaia (Acts 20)	55–57
<i>Letter to the Romans</i>	early 57
Paul to Jerusalem (Acts 21:1–23:22)	May 57
Paul imprisoned in Caesarea (Acts 23:23–26:32)	57–59
Paul sent to house arrest in Rome (Acts 27:1–28:31)	59–62
<i>Letters to Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon</i>	60?–62
<i>Letters to Timothy and Titus</i>	?
Paul executed in Rome	65?

Paul the missionary

Paul spent ten years in the Roman provinces of Cilicia and Syria (see Galatians 1:21), probably preaching Jesus along with Greek-speaking Jewish Christians. Then a believer named Barnabas called him to Syrian Antioch, where by this time rapid conversions had made the church more Gentile than Jewish.⁵ After a while, the church in Antioch commissioned Paul and Barnabas to evangelize the provinces of Cyprus and Galatia. The two men succeeded in founding churches in several cities. Indeed, the mission to the Gentiles was so successful that the apostles in Jerusalem invited Paul and Barnabas to a council to clarify exactly what God expected of Gentile believers (see Acts 15). Paul spent the eight years after the council in Jerusalem planting more churches. He went first to Macedonia, where he founded churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea (see Acts 16:1–17:15). Trouble from the Jews in Macedonia drove him south to Greece. He received a cold reception in Athens, so he traveled on to Corinth, the capital of the Roman province of Achaia (modern Greece).

Paul and his mission team spent a year and a half in Corinth to found a church firmly in that important city (see Acts 18:1-18). When things looked solid in Corinth, Paul sailed back east to Antioch and Jerusalem, then traveled west again to plant a church in Ephesus, the capital of the province of Asia (part of modern Turkey). Meanwhile, the church at Corinth received a great blessing in the person of another stellar Christian leader. A former Jew named Apollos arrived to teach the faith and debate Corinthian Jews who opposed Christianity (see Acts 18:24-28).

Toward the end of his three-year stay in Ephesus, Paul began to receive disturbing news from Corinth. He wrote a letter (now lost) instructing the Corinthian believers not to associate with church members who practiced illicit sex (see 1 Corinthians 5:9). Sometime later, members of the household of a believer named Chloe brought news that the Corinthian church was splitting into factions, each of which claimed some prominent leader as its authority (see 1 Corinthians 1:11). Then three members of the church brought Paul a letter from the whole body (see 1 Corinthians 7:1; 16:17). This letter was full of questions about various issues, but the messengers also reported scandalous information: incest, class snobbery, and other problems were infecting the church. In response to these ills, Paul dictated a long letter—the one we call 1 Corinthians.

Corinth

Paul spent more time in Corinth and Ephesus than in any other city he visited (besides Rome and Caesarea, where he was imprisoned), for as two of the most important trading centers in the Empire, they were promising hubs for evangelism. A strong church in Corinth could spread the gospel not only throughout Greece, but through trading connections all over the known world. Likewise, a fractured or heretical church in Corinth could either collapse the gospel or spread a false gospel throughout the world.

The Romans utterly demolished Corinth in 146 BC for resisting Roman domination, but Julius Caesar rebuilt it a century later as a Roman colony. As a colony, it was populated primarily with Roman citizens, but as a commercial center, it was soon full also of Greeks, Syrians, Asians, Egyptians, and a large community of Jews. It is estimated that in Paul's day 250,000 free persons and some 400,000 slaves inhabited Corinth, not to mention the thousands of tradesmen, sailors, and tourists who visited.⁶ Because of its cosmopolitan flavor, Corinth was considered the least Greek of the Greek cities and the least Roman of the Roman colonies.⁷

The source of Corinth's prosperity was commerce. The city sat astride the narrow isthmus that connected mainland Greece with the peninsula called the Peloponnese. Because weather and rocks made it hazardous to sail around the Peloponnese, it was far less costly for ships to go through Corinth. They would dock at the harbor of Cenchrea (east of Corinth on the Saronic Gulf). There, large ships would unload their cargo onto wagons, which would haul the cargo on a sort of wooden railway (the *diolkos*) to the harbor of Lechaum (west of Corinth on the Corinthian Gulf). Smaller ships were hauled fully loaded across the three and a half miles of the *diolkos*. Thus, the most sensible way to get anything to Rome from Ephesus, China, or Egypt was through Corinth.

Corinth's prosperity led to luxury and licentiousness. Indeed, in polite Greek, the word "to Corinthianize" meant "to practice sexual immorality" or "to debauch." The most notorious of Corinth's dozen temples was dedicated to Aphrodite, the goddess of love. About a thousand female slaves staffed the temple to practice ritual prostitution with worshipers (including sailors and tourists). This was a profitable attraction and contributed both to Corinth's prosperity and her reputation.⁸ Yet Corinth also had prestige. In Greek jargon, a person who spoke "Corinthian words" had pretensions to philosophy and learning. The Isthmian Games, which were second in importance only to the Olympic Games, were celebrated every other year under Corinth's governance.⁹ And Corinth was both the capital of Achaia and its richest city. In short, wealth, loose morals, and intellectual pride were the Corinthian hallmarks.

First Corinthians

Predictably, wealth, loose morals, and intellectual pride lay at the root of the troubles in the Corinthian church. There were divisions between those members who liked Paul's simple style and those who preferred a more sophisticated and philosophical approach to religion. There was strife between those who thought freedom in Christ meant liberation from "outworn" taboos about sex and food, those who felt that Jewish and other rules must be kept strictly, and those who believed something in between. There was jealousy between those who possessed the kind of flashy gifts of the Spirit that suggested true enlightenment and those who did not. And there was bitterness between the rich and the poor. All this Paul addressed in his letter, at the same time dispatching his aide Timothy to help sort things out in person.

First Corinthians is not a doctrinal treatise but a pastor's response to problems, yet it is the source of some of our most helpful information about Christian faith and practice.

First impressions

It is much easier to study a book passage by passage if you have first examined it as a whole. An overview is especially necessary if you have never studied the book before. Below are some suggestions for an overview of 1 Corinthians. Look over questions 1 through 5 before you begin.

Study Skill—Interpreting Epistles

The hardest thing about understanding biblical letters is that we have only half of the correspondence. That is, we know what Paul said, but we don't know anything else about the situations he was responding to, the people he was writing to, or the questions they were asking. It is a little like listening to one end of a telephone conversation and trying to figure out what is being said on the other end. Often—with matters ranging from the Cephas party (who were they, and what did they believe?) in 1:12 to “baptized for the dead” (what on earth is this?) in 15:29—we can only guess. In order to make educated guesses rather than wild speculations, we need to be careful detectives observing every clue.

As you read 1 Corinthians for the first time, don't try to answer every question about what is going on. Don't try to absorb every detail. Look for the main ideas, the threads that tie paragraphs together, and the questions you want to answer for yourself later. This broad overview is essential preparation for the close detective work later on.

1. What if you could have been one of the Corinthian Christians who just received this letter from Paul? Read it through once for the overall message, just as you might read any letter. Don't stop to unravel difficult pieces; just try to follow the big ideas.

As you read, keep a list of repeated words, phrases, and ideas that seem important to Paul's message. (For example, you'll notice that words like *proud*, *arrogant*, and *puffed up* appear often.) This list will help you notice the main issues Paul is addressing and the main ideas he wants to get across. It will also suggest questions you will want to answer when you study further.

2. Jot here any questions that came up during your first reading—any terms or passages you'd like clarified, for example. You can also write down any questions prompted by the introduction.

Study Skill—Broad Outline

It is often easier to see the big picture of a long book like 1 Corinthians if you make a broad outline during your overview. The best way to do this on your own is to make up a title for each chapter then try to group the chapters together. As you go along, you'll find that the chapter divisions are not always the best places to break but they are a place to start. (The chapters of the New Testament were devised several centuries after the books were written. They aid us in finding passages, but they are not inspired by God in the way that the books themselves are.)

3. Below, we've suggested some ways in which you might group the sections of 1 Corinthians. Go back through the book and write down titles that you think express what each smaller section is about. Then write titles for each of the larger sections. (You can change any of the divisions if you like.)

1:1-9 _____

1:10-4:21 _____

1:10-17 _____

1:18-3:4 _____

3:5–4:5 _____

4:6-21 _____

5:1–6:20 _____

5:1-13 _____

6:1-11 _____

6:12-20 _____

7:1-40 _____

8:1–11:1 _____

8:1-13 _____

9:1-27 _____

10:1-13 _____

10:14-22 _____

10:23–11:1 _____

11:2–14:40 _____

11:2-16 _____

11:17-34 _____

12:1–14:40 _____

15:1-58 _____

16:1-24 _____

4. What do you observe about Paul as a person from his letter to the Corinthians? (Is he proud, humble, intelligent, slow of mind, passionate, cool . . . ?)
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

5. How would you summarize what this letter as a whole is about? What are its main themes? What is Paul's overall purpose for writing it?

Study Skill—Application

When we observe and interpret what a biblical book says and means, we often have to think about its human author and first-century readers. It is important to understand what God was saying to them in their situation before we decide what He is saying to us in ours. Nevertheless, 2 Timothy 3:16-17 tells us that "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." James 1:22 urges us to do what the Word says, not merely hear it. Therefore, the last step of Bible study should always be to ask yourself, "What difference should this passage make to my life? How should it make me want to think or act?" Application will require time, thought, prayer, and perhaps even discussion with another person.

At times you may find it most productive to concentrate on one specific application, giving it careful thought and prayer. At other times you may want to list many implications a passage of Scripture has for your life, meditating on them all for several days before you choose one for concentrated prayer and action. Use whatever method helps you take to heart and act on what the passage says.

6. How is the overall message of 1 Corinthians relevant to your life? What actions or matters for prayer and thought does your first reading of this book encourage you to pursue?

For the group

This “For the group” section and the ones in later lessons are intended to suggest ways of structuring your discussions. Feel free to select what suits your group and ignore the rest. The main goals of this lesson are to get to know 1 Corinthians as a whole and the people with whom you are going to study it.

Worship. Some groups like to begin with prayer and/or singing. Some share requests for prayer at the beginning, but leave the actual prayer until after the study. Others prefer just to chat and have refreshments for a while and then move to the study, leaving worship until the end. It is a good idea to start with at least a brief prayer for the Holy Spirit’s guidance and some silence to help everyone change focus from the day’s busyness to the Scripture.

Warm-up. The beginning of a new study is a good time to lay a foundation for honest sharing of ideas, to get comfortable with each other, and to encourage a sense of common purpose. One way to establish common ground is to talk about what each group member hopes to get out of your group—out of your study of 1 Corinthians, and out of any prayer, singing, sharing, outreach, or anything else you might do together. Why do you want to study the Bible, and 1 Corinthians in particular? If you have someone write down each member’s hopes and expectations, then you can look back at these goals later to see if they are being met. Allow about fifteen minutes for this discussion so that it does not degenerate into vague chatting.

How to use this study. If the group has never used a LIFECHANGE study guide before, you might take a whole meeting to get acquainted, discuss your goals, and go over the “How to Use This Study” section. Then you can take a second meeting to discuss the overview. This will assure that everyone understands the study and will give you more time to read all of 1 Corinthians and answer the overview questions.

Go over the parts of the “How to Use This Study” section that you think the group should especially notice. For example, point out the optional questions in the margins. These are available as group discussion questions, ideas for application, and suggestions for further study. It is unlikely that anyone will have the time or desire to answer all the optional questions. A person might do one “Optional Application” for any given lesson. You might choose one or two “For Thought and Discussion” questions for your group discussion, or you might spend all your time on the numbered questions. If someone wants to write answers to the optional questions suggest that he or she use a separate notebook. It will also be helpful for discussion notes, prayer requests, answers to prayers, application plans, and so on.

Invite everyone to ask questions about how to use the study guide and how your discussions will go.

Reading. It is often helpful to refresh everyone’s memory by reading the passage aloud before discussing the questions. Reading all of 1 Corinthians is probably out of the question, but you might ask someone to read 1:1-17,

using the tone of voice he or she thinks Paul would have used in speaking these words. Try to make the chapter sound like a living person talking to a real group of people he knows.

Introduction. Ask a few questions about the background material, such as, “What do you think are the important things we should know about Paul? About the city of Corinth? About the church in Corinth?” Group members don’t need to memorize all of the information, but that material should help them understand the people and situations that lie behind 1 Corinthians. The more real the people and circumstances are to you, the easier it will be for you to interpret the letter.

First impressions. Give everyone a chance to answer questions 1, 2, 4, and 5. Make a master list of all the repeated words, phrases, and ideas that everyone observed. Make another list of everyone’s questions. You probably won’t want to answer those questions now, but you should keep them handy and return to them at appropriate points in your study.

Next, compare your outlines (question 3). You might also want to compare them to outlines you find in study Bibles or commentaries. If you do, observe both what all the outlines have in common and how they differ. Which approaches do you find most helpful?

Let everyone respond to question 6. If some group members are unfamiliar with applying Scripture to their lives, plan to take time at your next meeting to discuss how to do this and to brainstorm some possible applications. The Study Skills on pages 25–26 in lesson 2 may be of help.

Wrap-up. The group leader should have read lesson 2 and its “For the group” section. At this point, he or she might give a short summary of what members can expect in that lesson and the coming meeting. This is a chance to whet everyone’s appetite, assign any optional questions, omit any numbered questions, or forewarn members of possible difficulties.

Encourage any members who found the overview especially difficult. Some people are better at seeing the big picture than others. Some are best at analyzing a particular verse or paragraph, while others are strongest at seeing how a passage applies to their lives. Urge members to give thanks for their own and others’ strengths, and to give and request help when needed. The group is a place to learn from each other. Later lessons will draw on the gifts of close analyzers as well as overviews and appliers, practical as well as theoretical thinkers.

Worship. Many groups like to end with singing and/or prayer. This can include songs and prayers that respond to what you’ve learned in 1 Corinthians or prayers for specific needs of group members.

Some people are shy about sharing personal needs or praying aloud in groups, especially before they know the other people well. If this is true of your group, then a song and/or some silent prayer and a short closing prayer spoken by the leader might be an appropriate end. You could also share requests and pray in pairs.

1. A. T. Robertson, "Paul, the Apostle," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956), 2276.
2. F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 41–43.
3. Bruce, 32–40.
4. Bruce, 50–52.
5. Bruce, 127–133.
6. Kenneth Barker, ed., *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 1732.
7. Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1958), 16.
8. F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 18–19.
9. Morris, 16; F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 89.