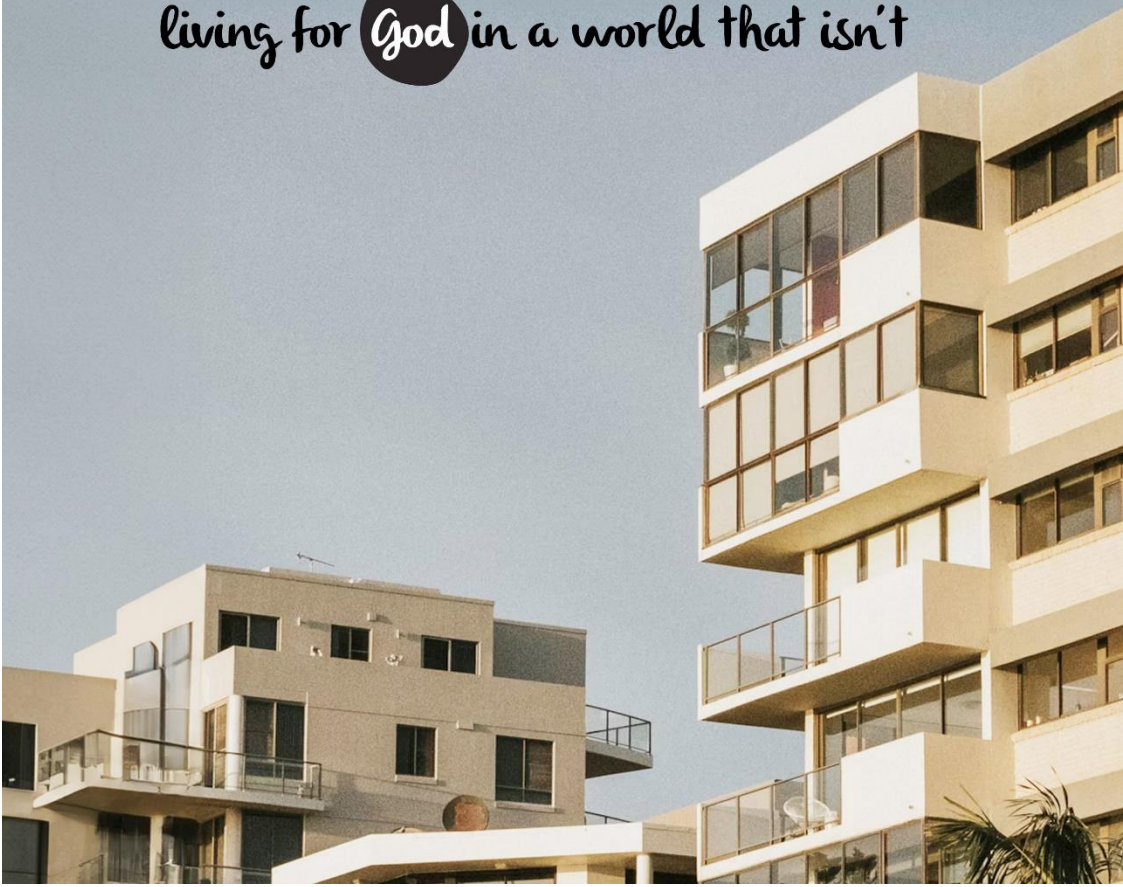


Leader's Notes

1 CORINTHIANS

living for **God** in a world that isn't



| DATE | BIBLE | DATE | BIBLE |
|---------------|--------------------------------|------------|---------------------------------|
| 29 Apr-5 May | 1 Cor 1:1-9 | 10-16 June | 1 Cor 3:1-9 |
| 6-12 May | 1 Cor 1:10-17 | 17-23 June | Choose your own |
| 13-19 May | 1 Cor 1:18-25 | 24-30 June | 1 Cor 4:1-7 |
| 20-26 May | Pulse Check | 1-7 July | 1 Cor 4:8-17 |
| 27 May-2 June | 1 Cor 1:26-2:5 | 8-14 July | Small Groups on Break |
| 3-9 June | 1 Cor 2:6-16 | 15-21 July | Small Groups on Break |

1 CORINTHIANS

The Church of God in Corinth had a problem – they were too much like Corinth and not enough like God. That’s the same challenge we face living for God in Wollongong! So our series in 1 Corinthians will help us live for God in a world that isn’t. We’re unpacking this letter over several years, starting with chapters 1-4 which show us what true wisdom looks like.

ABOUT CORINTH

Paul planted the church in Corinth on his 2nd missionary trip, around 50 AD – you can read about it in Acts 18:1-11. It’s actually his second letter to the church (see 1 Cor 5:9) but we don’t have a record of that earlier letter.



Corinth was a major city in the Roman Empire, as it was located in the Centre of the Empire and allowed sharing of trade, philosophy and religion between the Greek speaking East and Latin speaking West.

ABOUT 1 CORINTHIANS

The church in Corinth is famous for being a mess - if you lived in Corinth you'd probably go to the church in the city next door instead!

But despite their huge problems, Paul never once tells them they're not Christians or are unloved by God. In fact Paul constantly reminds them they're "those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people" (1:2), who have "Grace and peace...from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:3), who have been "called...into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1:9); and Paul is confident God "will also keep you firm to the end, so you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:8).

So if they're the church of God, where have all the problems come from?! Here's some insights from *Roy Ciampa* and *Brian Rosner* in their commentary on 1 Corinthians...

The main problem for the Corinthian Christians is actually signalled in the opening verses of Paul's letter. He writes in 1 Corinthians 1:2 to "the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified, called to be holy." That the church in Corinth is God's church is repeated three times. Yet the Corinthians were still behaving as if they belonged to their city!

Lyle D. Vander Broek offers a pithy summary: "Each of the community problems Paul needed to address grew out of the Corinthians' inability to let the gospel message fully reshape their gentile, Greco-Roman lives, whether because they misunderstood that message or because they rejected it outright. They were Hellenists through and through, and this eschatological, cross-centered, body-affirming Jewish sect called Christianity demanded that they enter another theological and ethical world. It is no surprise that these residents of Corinth would seek rhetorical wisdom, be unconcerned with immorality and the preservation of the body, be infatuated with asceticism and spiritual empowerment, and preserve the distinctions between rich and poor. The Corinthians were simply trying to be Christians with a minimal amount of social and theological disturbance."

Paul was prompted to write 1 Corinthians in response to disturbing news from the church. This included both oral reports, from Chloe's people (1:11) and Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (16:17), and a letter from the church that Paul mentions in 7:1 consisting of a series of questions posed by the congregation.

As far as we can reconstruct the situation, after Paul left Corinth, Apollos, and possibly Peter, visited, and this caused unintended problems as well as bringing various benefits. The congregation was now divided based on loyalty to their favourite Christian leader (1:12). Further, Paul learned that they were in considerable disarray, with some members engaging each other in civil litigation (6:1–11), cases of sexual immorality (5:1–13; 6:12–20), marriage problems (7:1–40), and questions concerning food offered to idols (chs. 8–10) and spiritual gifts (chs. 12–14).

In short, the Corinthians were “worldly,” “acting like mere human beings” (1 Cor. 3:3). In this sense the letter is a timeless challenge to Christians of all generations and in all places not to be conformed to the world (Rom. 12:2).

Ciampa, R. E., & Rosner, B. S. (2010). The First Letter to the Corinthians (p. 5). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

STRUCTURE

1 Corinthians seems to follow this structure, based on the questions Paul was asked by the Corinthians, and the issues he himself wants to address.

1. Letter Opening (1:1–9)
2. True and False Wisdom and Corinthian Factionalism (1:10–4:17)
 - a. Factions in the Community (1:10–17)
 - b. Negative Treatment: “No More Boasting about Human Leaders” (1:18–2:5)
 - c. Positive Treatment: “Let Those Who Boast Boast in the Lord” (2:6–3:4)
 - d. Application to the Church, Ministers, and Ministry (3:5–4:17)
3. “Flee Sexual Immorality” and “Glorify God with Your Bodies” (4:18–7:40)
 - a. Negative Treatment: “Flee Sexual Immorality” (and Greed) (4:18–6:20)
 - b. Positive Treatment: “Glorify God with Your Bodies” (7:1–40)
4. Flee Idolatry” and “Glorify God” in Your Worship (8:1–14:40)
 - a. Negative Treatment: “Flee Idolatry” (Food Offered to Idols) (8:1–11:1)
 - b. Positive Treatment: “Glorify God” in Your Worship (11:2–14:40)
5. The Resurrection and Consummation (15:1–58)
6. Letter Closing (16:1–24)

CHAPTERS 1-4: FOOLISH WISDOM

"The Corinthians were saying that they belonged to their favourite leaders and boasted about their wisdom and power and Paul's deficiencies in these areas. To heal their divisions, Paul says four main things in response:

- (1) the message of the cross spells the end of human wisdom and power;
- (2) the cross redefines wisdom and folly, power and weakness;
- (3) instead of boasting in their leaders' wisdom and power they should boast in the wisdom and power of God in the gospel which gives them a favourable and secure status before God; and
- (4) the Corinthians do not belong to their leaders but rather their leaders belong to them, and, above all, they all belong to Christ!" (*Ciampa & Rosner*)

HOW THEY'LL CHANGE

Another point worth noting is *how* Paul tries to fix their problems. He could have issued lots of commands, called on his authority as an apostle, or any other number of approaches. Instead, he helps them understand the gospel better. The answer to all their problems is a deeper grasp of what God has done for them in Jesus and the implications that flow from that. These are things they've either forgotten, misunderstood or rejected. A true deeper understanding of the gospel powers change to live for God.

USING THESE NOTES

The Code: these notes use a symbol-based code to help you easily work out which questions might best suit your Small Group.

→ **Simpler:** questions with this arrow symbol → trace 1 idea through a passage. So they're great if you have time pressures, less mature Christians in your group, or just want to unpack and apply 1 big theme.

++ **Bonus:** questions with this plus symbol ++ fill-in the picture more. So they're great if you want to dig deeper or explore a few extra ideas. You don't need to ask every bonus question; just pick the best ones.

The Goal: Remember, the purpose of a bible discussion is... to discuss the bible. It's not to ask every question in the notes and tick them all off. These notes will help you dig into the bible but don't let them get in the way of the actual goal – wrestling with the bible together, loving it and living it out.

1 COR 1:1-9 • 29 APR-5 MAY

DIRECTION: In the midst of mess, God is at work in the Corinthians.

Have you ever stared at someone's messy room as they tell you that they "have a system?" Sometimes it's hard to see the good in the mess, but that is where God is at work. In his introduction, Paul is priming the Corinthians (and us) with the themes that will pervade the entire letter. In the midst of this letter about their messiness he shows God is at work in Christians who haven't gotten it right (like us). There are a few curly points that might raise questions about assurance and gifts - Paul will develop those ideas later in the book so it might be better to hold them in tension until we get to them.

PRAY TO START: Thank God for bringing us together and pray for deeper understanding of the gospel throughout 1 Corinthians.

LAUNCH:

→ What do you know about the letter of 1 Corinthians?

They're a messy church & Paul talks about divisions, church discipline, lawsuits between members, personal immorality, marriage, Christian freedom, apostolic traditions, spiritual gifts, resurrection hope, collecting for believers. Lots to discuss!

CONTEXT:

→ Read **Acts 18:12-17**. What kind of picture do you get of Corinth?

Brutal, wild, and uncaring. 'The Jews' even beat up Sosthenes, their own synagogue leader! But God is at work even in redeeming Sosthenes (1 Cor 1:1).

READ: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

OBSERVATION:

→ List the things that *God has done / is doing* for the Corinthians and the things that *they have done / are doing*. Notice the tenses.

| God's Work | Their Work |
|---|-------------------------|
| <i>Sanctified and called (past tense) v2</i> | <i>Eagerly wait v 7</i> |
| <i>Given grace in Jesus (past tense) v4</i> | |
| <i>Enriched them with speech and knowledge (past tense) v5</i> | |
| <i>Confirming the testimony about Jesus (present tense) v6</i> | |
| <i>Given them every spiritual gift (past tense) v7</i> | |
| <i>Keep you firm to the end & blameless (future tense) v8</i> | |
| <i>Called you into fellowship with Jesus (past tense) v9</i> | |

→ What do you notice? Is it an equal share in the work?

MEANING:

→ Why do you think Paul draws their attention to the work God has done / is doing for the Corinthians, rather than their work?

→ What comfort might this opening bring during the incoming rebukes?

Someone might be tempted to say "Are the Corinthians even Christians after all this mess?" But God's grace is powerfully at work amongst them, despite the mess, and our salvation and future rest on his work not ours.

→ How would knowing God's character assure the Corinthians?

He is gracious so has saved them and he is faithful so won't remove his grace.

→ Which verse would you pick to summarise this section?

v4 is a classic: God's grace is at work in these messy Christians!

++ Count the number of times that Paul refers to Jesus as “Christ,” “Lord,” or “Son.” Why do you think Paul wants to remind them of Jesus’ titles?

Christ - 9. Lord - 6. Son - 1. Jesus is king of the cosmos! So they need to obey him.

++ Follow the flow of thought from v 4-6. How is God confirming the gospel amongst the Corinthians?

He is enriching them with speech and knowledge. If they have ANY gifts, its because of the Spirit (12:4). And if they have the Spirit, then they are Christians (12:3).

++ v7 starts with “therefore.” How does God’s confirmation prove they don’t lack any gifts?

If they are Christians, then the Spirit has distributed ALL of the gifts needed to build up the church (12:4).

APPLY:

→ What makes you feel inferior as a Christian? How could this passage give you comfort?

E.g. People who know lots of Bible verses or pray really well. All of this is a GIFT from God FOR God, not to elevate ourselves. Comparison is the thief of joy when everything we receive is a gift.

→ How confident are you that you are saved? Or that you will last the distance as a Christian? How might this passage give us comfort?

Often the root of lack of assurance is functionally believing that we are the source of our own salvation. But it's not about the strength of our faith to carry us to the end, but about the object of our faith to save us – the fact that God is gracious & faithful.

++ What title do you prefer to give to Jesus? How can you grow to live with Jesus as “King” and “Lord” this week?

++ Some Christians say that certain gifts are necessary to prove that you are a Christian. How does this passage change that thinking?

PRAY TO END: Praise God for the work that he has done, is doing, and will do in us.

1 COR 1:10-17 • 6-12 MAY

DIRECTION: We want to give our allegiance to Christ alone.

In Corinth it was normal to follow leaders based on how impressive they seemed and to align yourself with their “brand” so you got respect by association. The same thing happens today when we “follow” social media influencers/podcasters/authors, use particular products, or wear particular clothing brands to get respect by association. The Corinthian Church were doing this with Christian leaders and it had split their church, jeopardising the very unity Jesus died to create! Paul takes chapters 1-4 to fix this issue. 1:10-17 gives us only the beginning of his response, but we see what he wants them to do instead (be united) and the cause of the issue (unbelief).

PRAY TO START: Pray that we may listen to and follow only our King.

LAUNCH:

→ *Who* is your favourite Christian preacher / author / podcaster / social-media influencer? *Why* do you find them better than others?

++ Have a debate in your group: which of the Apostles was the best one?

READ: 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

OBSERVATION:

→ In your own words, what does Paul command them to do / be in v10?

Avoid dividing from one another and be united in believing the same things.

→ What issue in the Corinthian Church leads him to command this?

The Corinthian Christians have divided over which leader they follow and give their allegiance to. Their preferences for their favourite pastors is splitting their church and distracting them from the fact they're all united in following Christ.

++ What do you know about the Christian leaders Paul refers to in v12?

Look up Acts 18:8; 18:24, 27-28; John 1:40-42 for more about Paul, Apollos & Peter.

MEANING:

→ Why might the Corinthian Church have divided over this issue?

In Corinth it was normal to follow a leader based on how impressive they seemed, their rhetorical/teaching skills, their power and influence. So people would regularly align themselves with the "brand" of a leader, so that they would get respect too by association, based on who they followed. The same thing can happen for us now.

→ Division can be a symptom of the true disease: a lack of belief. What is it that the Corinthians aren't believing?

They don't believe that the gospel about Christ is impressive and powerful, so they're hitching their wagons to influential speakers who appear to have eloquent power.

→ Why would the "cross of Christ be emptied of its power" if Paul was to preach with "wisdom and eloquence? (v17)?

Because then they'd trust and rely on Paul / Apollos / Peter's impressive wisdom and skills rather than in the power of the message about the cross. Basically, they want to trust in Jesus' death - which looks very pathetic, shameful and powerless but is actually powerful to save - and at the same time associate themselves only with impressive sounding powerful leaders. Those 2 things are incompatible.

→ Paul will take most of chapters 1-4 to fix this problem, but in this first bit of his argument how does he try to bring unity and undo their divisions?

By telling them to seek it (v10), by appealing to the unity all Christians everywhere have in the Lord Jesus (v2), by showing how absurd it is to think Christ is divided or that Paul is worthy of more honour than Jesus (v13). The primary solution to disunity is the gospel of reconciliation!

APPLY:

→ Is it helpful to have a favourite Christian preacher / author / podcaster / social-media influencer?

→ When could that become a problem?

It's very helpful in as much as they teach you about God, help you obey him, and point you to your unity with every other Christian believer. It becomes a problem when you give your allegiance to them over and above Christ, or when you try to get identity or respect not from Christ but based on the fact you follow them.

→ So how can we learn from Christian leaders without worshipping them?

→ Are divisions among Christians always unhelpful? Should we always try to be “perfectly united in mind and thought” as Christians?

Division is different to diversity - diversity is a blessing Jesus gives his church to serve the body and reach the lost, as Paul says in 1 Cor 12:15-20.

However, division is taking a stand to separate yourself from someone based on an idea / belief / practise. When Christians do that with other Christians it's a problem as it undermines our unity as believers in the same saving Lord. A better approach is to start from that shared unity and to open the scriptures together to discover God's truth, so we can be “perfectly united” in knowing God's “mind and thought” from the scriptures - and humbly being ready to be corrected yourself.

→ When is division a really good thing?

Division / clearly separating ourselves from unbelievers or from people who claim to be Christians but aren't is a good thing as it protects us from false teaching, shows the world we don't teach / practise / believe the same things and makes the gospel attractive. By “separating” I don't mean avoiding or living in a Christian bubble. I mean telling people or living in such a way that shows you disagree with an idea / belief / practise because you believe, follow and practise what God says instead.

++ What divisions do you think are popular among Christians today? Are they helpful or unhelpful?

e.g. Infant/adult baptism; Hands raised/hands down during music; alcohol/non-alcohol; end-times discussions, etc.

++ How can you keep the “cross of Christ” the main thing in your life: this week? This year? For the rest of your life?

PRAY: Praise God for the thousands of Christian leaders, teachers and examples he's given us all across the world and all through history. Ask for his help to worship, follow and give our loyalty and allegiance to Christ alone though.

1 COR 1:18-25 • 13-19 MAY

DIRECTION: In choosing to save people via the foolish weak message of Jesus dead on a cross, God is judging human wisdom and power.

Using the lens of human wisdom and power to assess a Christian leader, and then deciding to follow and give them your allegiance based on that lens, is a really bad idea. Paul gives many reasons why it's bad in chapters 1-4. Here is his first reason: the gospel is the direct opposite of human wisdom and power – and what's more, human wisdom and power is under God's judgement, so you can't be saved if you use it.

PRAY: Help us put our confidence in you God, and not in humans.

LAUNCH:

→ Have you ever felt embarrassed by the gospel or ashamed of Jesus?

CONTEXT:

→ What's the first problem in the Corinthian Church Paul is trying to fix?

They were undermining their unity by following Christian leaders based on how impressive and eloquent they seemed, rather than following Christ alone.

READ: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

OBSERVATION:

→ Read this paraphrase. What words would you put in the blank spaces?

Jesus didn't send me to preach with lots of fancy words and impressive language; if I did people would trust me more than the cross! I get it: the message of the Cross seems like sheer silliness to most people, but to those God is saving it has true power to save. It's like God said:

I'll annihilate and crush conventional human wisdom;
I'll expose so-called human experts as shams.

So where can you find someone truly wise in this day and age? Hasn't God exposed all human "wisdom" as pretentious nonsense by refusing to use human "wisdom" to reveal himself? Since the world could never use its wisdom to know God, God in his wisdom was stoked to use the message of Christ murdered, of all things, to save people.

While Jews request miraculous demonstrations of power and Greeks go in for philosophical insights, we go right on proclaiming Christ murdered. Jews treat this like an anti-miracle, and Greeks think it's absurd. But to us who are personally called by God – both Jews and Greeks – Christ is the ultimate display of real and true power and wisdom, because human wisdom is so dumb next to the "foolishness" of God, and human power can't even begin to compete with God's "weakness."

MEANING:

→ What do the Corinthians find powerful and impressive?

v20 wisdom, teaching, philosophy, v22 for Jews signs, for Greeks wisdom.

→ Where does actual power come from?

The Gospel! The message of the cross (v18) and of Christ crucified (v23) is what displays God's power, and what God uses to save.

→ Why does the message of the cross seem foolish and weak to some?

"We preach Christ crucified" is like saying our amazing impressive powerful message is that our president died by lethal injection, or the well-respected headmaster of our fancy school was executed in an electric chair. From the lens of human wisdom, there's nothing amazing impressive or powerful about that at all!

→ Why do you think God chooses to save in a way that'll make no sense to people if they're using the lens of human wisdom and power to assess it?

God wants to show up and judge the folly of human wisdom and power - human wisdom and power is just another expression of sin! To know God and be saved we have to abandon human self-reliance and humble ourselves. All the gospel requires of humans is humility, but that's the hardest thing of all for wise, powerful & strong people to have. You can't get there by holding onto human power and wisdom.

++ What makes the foolishness of the cross sound like good news to us?

God needs to work in our hearts to hear the Gospel, as he calls us by it (v24) and unveils our eyes (2 Cor 4:3-6), so we respond to it with trust and faith in Jesus.

APPLY:

→ God deliberately chooses to save via an approach that causes people to stumble or write it off as foolish. Does that seem fair or good to you?

You can't start from human self-reliance and then wholeheartedly say "nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling". This is a feature, not a bug. It's like how Jesus uses parables to make it harder for people to understand, so that those who really want to know him will come to him.

→ Paul says "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16).

Can you say the same thing? Why yes, why no?

→ When you're trying to share the good news of Jesus with someone who doesn't believe, what do you think the best strategy is?

There's lots of possible answers to this: genuinely loving people so they know they're not just a project to you, sharing verses from the bible, introducing them to other Christians so they can see what Christianity looks like, answering their questions that might block them from exploring Jesus, sharing your testimony so they can see why Jesus is relevant, etc. The main thing though is to realise the power to save comes from God not us, and he uses his word and the gospel message to do that.

→ Should we try *not* to persuade or speak clearly when teaching the bible to Christians, or sharing the gospel with unbelievers? Why yes, why no?

The "human wisdom" to avoid is not to stop persuading, or speaking clearly and powerfully, or compelling people to respond to God's word. Paul himself says: "Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others" (2 Cor 5:11) and how we teach affects the result: "At Iconium Paul and Barnabas... spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Greeks believed." (Acts 14:1)

The problem is putting your trust in self-promoting, manipulative, human rhetoric. It's trying to win an audience to you so that they'll listen to your message. It's appealing to human vanity, self-sufficiency, self-reliance. Instead trust that God will use his wisdom and power to save through the, seemingly, weak powerless cross.

PRAY TO END: Help us not to be ashamed of the shameful message of the Cross! Please use us and your gospel to powerfully save those we know and love who are far from you God.

PULSE CHECK • 20-26 MAY

DIRECTION: On Sunday we're pausing our journey through 1 Corinthians one week for *Grow Sunday*. So this week in Small Groups we'll do a 'pulse check' on our Christian lives and our Small Group. This'll help us reflect on how God's growing us, so we keep loving, trusting and obeying Him. This discussion would go great over a meal and laughs together.

PRAY: Help not to settle or drift in our Christian lives but to keep growing

PULSE CHECK:

→ If you haven't done this already, take 5-10 min to fill out the 'pulse check' at www.saltchurch.info/pulsecheck

→ Now, use those questions to reflect on how you're going as a Christian, and share with your Small Group:

→ What were you most encouraged by from your 'pulse check'?

→ What were you most challenged by from your 'pulse check'?

→ What's one change you want to make after doing your 'pulse check'?

→ More generally, what big thing is God teaching you at the moment?

→ Thinking about our *Small Group* now:

→ What could we do as a group to help each other grow as Christians?

→ What could we do more of? Do less of?

READING GOD'S WORD: Let's dig deeper in 1 area from the 'pulse check': reading the bible on our own. Split into pairs and for each of the passages in the table try to answer these 2 questions:

→ In these passages how is God's word described?

→ In these passages what are the benefits of reading God's word?

| Passage | How it's described | Benefits of reading it |
|-------------------|--|---|
| Psalm 1:1-3 | <i>The law of the Lord</i> | <i>It brings blessing, health & life like a fruitful tree.</i> |
| Psalm 19:7-11 | <i>Perfect, trustworthy, right, radiant, pure, firm, precious, sweet</i> | <i>It refreshes the soul, makes the simple wise, gives joy to our heart & light to the eyes, brings warning & reward</i> |
| Psalm 119:18, 105 | <i>Your law, your word</i> | <i>Seeing wonderful things, it guides us like a lamp & light on our path</i> |
| Matt 4:1-4 | <i>Words from the mouth of God</i> | <i>It gives us life, just as much as food gives us physical life</i> |
| 1 Thess 2:13 | <i>The word of God not (merely) of humans</i> | <i>God's word is at work in believers</i> |
| 2 Timothy 3:14-17 | <i>Holy scriptures, God-breathed, useful</i> | <i>Makes us wise to see salvation comes by trusting Jesus, teaches, rebukes, corrects, trains us to be righteous, fully equips us with all we need to do every good work God wants us to do</i> |

→ Share your answers with the whole group. What struck you most of all?

→ What do you find hard about reading the Bible on your own?

Sometimes we don't read the bible on our own as much as we'd like as we haven't made a *plan* to read it, even though we have the best of intentions.

Split into pairs and share this:

→ *When*: What time of day do you / will you read God's word?

→ *Where*: In what location will you be able to focus on it uninterrupted?

→ *What*: What plan/approach/book of the bible would you like to use?

→ *How*: Is there any resource you need to help you read God's word?

PRAY TO END: Keep growing our love, trust and obedience of you.

Please grow our Small Group so we help each other know you better and learn to love each other like you love us.

1 COR 1:26-2:5 • 27 MAY-2 JUNE

DIRECTION: The Corinthians and Paul are 2 examples of how God doesn't use human power and wisdom. Why not? So we only boast in Him.

2 more reasons why we, like God, should reject human wisdom and power: the example of the Corinthians and of Paul. Even though they love human wisdom and power they don't even match up to it. They're a live illustration of how God doesn't choose the powerful or impressive; if he did, they'd not make the list. And Paul has human wisdom and power he could use but he deliberately chooses not to use it, so they'd trust God's power and not his. Only God deserves glory, he is our only boast!

PRAY TO START: Help our faith to rest on your power not ours.

LAUNCH:

→ When have you been instantly humbled?

Thought you nailed it but didn't, or realised too late your fly was undone, etc.

READ: 1 Corinthians 1:26-2:5

OBSERVATION & MEANING:

→ In 1:26-31, how is the Corinthian Church a live example of Paul's point?

They're a living illustration of how God chooses not to use human wisdom and power but to reject it. If he did, he never would have chosen them.

→ In 2:1-5, how is Paul's ministry to them a live example of Paul's point?

In his demeanour and his speech, Paul deliberately undercuts his own wisdom and power, so they'd not trust his human wisdom but God's power.

→ Why did God choose to do it this way?

So we'd have nothing to boast in, and could only boast in him (1:29, 1:31, 2:5)

→ What do you think it looks like to “boast in the Lord”?

Boasting in the Lord looks like thanking, praising, honouring God for who he is and what he's done, and relying on him. It's the opposite of seeking our own glory or praise, and of relying on ourselves.

++ Read Jeremiah 9:23-24. What does this add to our answers?

These are some alternatives we could be tempted to trust in or praise ourselves for.

++ Why do you think Paul brings up “boasting” here? Why is that so bad?

They're boasting in their leaders. He summarises in 3:21 - “So then, no more boasting about human leaders!” Different opinions on Christian teachers isn't necessarily bad, but boasting (or thinking you're better than others) based on this is!

++ What do you think Paul *forgot* in order to “know nothing... except Jesus Christ and him crucified”?

Paul was trained by some of the best educators in the world to be a talented debater and orator. But he chooses not to use those skills in order to display the Spirit's power instead so they trust in God not in him.

→ What is the danger in using persuasive, clever, impressive, wise speech?

We might be dazzled & trust the flashy show & messenger, more than the message.

APPLY:

→ “Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called” (1:26). What reasons do *you* have to boast before God?

→ Even though you have none, what are you tempted to boast in anyway?

Consider: what causes you to elevate yourself above other Christians? What do you know, believe, say or do that makes you feel superior? What annoys you? e.g. persuasive apologetic arguments; how well we know the bible; our performance as Christians; anything that might make us feel 'holier than thou'.

→ How can we help each other to trust God's power alone?

PRAY: Take time to “boast in God” – thank, praise and honour God for who He is and what He's done. Especially for how he gives a righteousness, holiness and redemption we could not earn. Ask for his help to cling to it!

1 COR 2:6-16 • 3-9 JUNE

DIRECTION: He's demolished the human wisdom causing their division & now replaces it with the true *spiritual* wisdom they need. Paul's message comes with "a demonstration of the Spirit's power" (2:4). How? By revealing God. We can only know God and accept the gospel when the Spirit reveals it to us. So true wisdom, compared to human wisdom, is knowing God by the Holy Spirit, and getting insight from God's Spirit on how to live.

PRAY: That the Spirit may give us understanding as we read His word.

LAUNCH: → Who do you know so well you can almost read their mind?

READ: 1 Corinthians 2:6-16

OBSERVATION:

→ List what the Spirit does in this passage.

Reveals God's mystery to us (that all can be saved by trusting in Jesus); searches the deep things about God and teaches us those spiritual realities; helps us to discern spiritual truth; gives us the mind of Christ (so we can know and live like Jesus).

→ Who are the different groups here? How do they respond to the gospel?

| Group | Their response to the message |
|--|--|
| <i>The mature (v6)</i> | <i>Listen to and accept God's wisdom, not human wisdom.</i> |
| <i>Rulers of this age (v8)</i> | <i>Didn't understand the message so they crucified Jesus.</i> |
| <i>The person without the Spirit (v14)</i> | <i>Doesn't accept truth about God; considers the message of the cross to be foolishness and rejects it.</i> |
| <i>The person with the Spirit (v15)</i> | <i>Can understand what the Spirit teaches about God; judges rightly; doesn't worry what other people think of the gospel</i> |

MEANING:

→ Try to summarise the passage in 1 sentence, 15 words or less.

E.g. True wisdom can only be known when God the Holy Spirit reveals it to us.

Or in 40 words (:P) - The Spirit of God has searched the mind of eternity & revealed spiritual reality to sinful, rebellious humans with supernatural words so now we might know the mind of the king of all space and time!

→ Read **1 Thess 2:13-14 and 1:4-6**. How does this illustrate Paul's point?

The Spirit's power was demonstrated in the Thessalonian Christians in that, when they heard Paul speak human words, the Spirit enabled them to hear them as they really were – the words of God. So they could trust Jesus and powerfully live for him.

++ Where does the Holy Spirit speak to us?

The short answer is in the bible. But there's 2 elements to how He does this.

Inspiration: the words of the bible are the Holy Spirit's words. God, via the Spirit, led humans to communicate His truth in the bible. God the Father spoke the message about God the Son, and the breath/spirit that carried that to the human authors was the Holy Spirit. See 2 Peter 1:19-21 and 2 Tim 3:16-17.

Illumination: God the Spirit continues to speak to us every time we read the bible. This is what 1 Cor 2:14-16 is talking about, but see also Hebrews 3:6-13.

++ Have you ever felt like God the Holy Spirit was speaking directly to you?

This is often what the Holy Spirit's illumination feels like to us. Importantly, he does that through the words he has spoken in the past (inspiration) that he continues to speak and apply to us as we read them (illumination). Of course, he won't ever give an extra word that contradicts something he has said in the bible; Hebrews 1:1-2 shows us that the inspiration that happened to write the OT & NT has ended.

APPLY:

→ Imagine the spirit of the world spoke to you. How do you think it would differ from the Holy Spirit? What would it say? What would it sound like?

→ Do you know many of the deep things of God (2:10)? How does this passage encourage you to get into your bible more?

→ How does this passage encourage us as we try to share the gospel?

Ultimately, only the Spirit convinces people. So we don't need to trust in great clever arguments. We just need to share the gospel and the Spirit will cause it to be heard.

→ Who could you boldly share "God's wisdom" with this week? Play it out with a partner: how might that conversation go? Pray for a conversation.

PRAY: Thank God for making himself known. Pray we may know more of what "God has freely given us" (v12).

1 COR 3:1-9 • 10-16 JUNE

DIRECTION: The Corinthians are living like immature Christian babies so need to step up, and can do that as they know God gives the growth.

Last week we saw that the Spirit teaches spiritual truth and gives real wisdom. So Paul says to the Corinthians: you have divisions about us, so you're acting like you don't have the Spirit! You do though! So act like it.

PRAY TO START: That the Spirit might lead us into greater maturity.

LAUNCH: → When did you start to really feel like an adult?

We all became legal adults at 18, but the feeling might differ from the reality.

CONTEXT:

→ Read **2 Cor 5:15-17**. What is it like to use a "worldly point of view?"

READ: 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

OBSERVATION:

→ Paul calls them Christian babies. What evidence does he give of this?

The fact they're quarrelling and picking sides of which Christian leaders to follow shows they don't have true spiritual wisdom and know the deep things of God yet. They're not unbelievers; they're immature baby Christians who should know better by now, and their use of human wisdom instead of spiritual wisdom proves it.

→ There's 3 types of people in 3:1-4. Draw a picture of what they're like.

*People who live by the Spirit (which looks like all the things we saw last week).
People who live by the world / are mere humans (unbelievers). People who have the Spirit but act like the world (the immature Corinthian Christians).*

MEANING:

→ So what's 1 underlying reason there are divisions in their church?

They're living like unbelievers and not viewing people from a spiritual point of view.

++ What worldly desire might be causing the Corinthians to act this way?

By nature, we idolise people. But by the Spirit we see they're "only servants" (v5).

→ What will motivate them to be "people who live by the Spirit?" (3:1)

Ultimately the gospel. They are sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people (1:1), God is making them grow (3:6), they're his field and his building (3:9).

APPLY:

→ How would rank yourself on this (made-up) scale?

New Christian

Perfect

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

→ What criteria did you use to come up with that rank?

E.g. things you know about God, your prayer and bible reading habits, evangelistic zeal, personal godliness, love and trust of God, etc.

→ When do you act like a "mere human?"

Here are some helpful categories to comb through: Desires, Goals, Habits, Patterns of behaviour, Attitudes, Thoughts, Beliefs, etc.

++ What would it look like for us to live by the Spirit instead?

→ Where does the power and hope to grow as a Christian come from?

God gives the growth (3:6)! We can't change us, but God can and will.

→ If you never learnt anything new about God, would you be ok with that?

→ Do you want to grow as a Christian this year? Why/why not?

++ What do you think of the idea we should "let go and let God grow us"?

It's more a case of get going since God grows us. See also Phil 2:12-13

PRAY: Thank God for the Spirit's work in your life so far. Confess ways we live as "mere humans" and ask him to lead you into deeper maturity.

CHOOSE YOUR OWN • 17-23 JUN

DIRECTION: Take this week to choose your own adventure. Options...

- Grab a feed and have social fun times (more on that below)
- Take it in turns to share testimonies of God saving or changing you.
- Write your own bible discussion on a topic the group wants to explore (more on that below)

WHY 'CHOOSE YOUR OWN' WEEKS:

One downside of the way we unpack books at Salt is we move quick! You might have started a great chat in your group 1 week, but by the next we've moved on. So we sprinkle these 'choose your own' weeks throughout the year to give you a chance to choose your own adventure – to have social fun times together, to continue 1 of those great chats, or to look at another topic / question / part of the bible your group wants to explore.

SOCIAL FUN TIMES:

The key for a social is not simply to have fun together – though make sure you do that! Be intentional and use this moment to build trust and deeper relationships. That'll flow into the normal weeks where you share, pray and read the bible together. Deeper relationships allow everyone to be more open with what's really going on in our lives and more honest about what we think the bible means and how we're going living it out.

If you do a social refresh yourself on chapters 5-6 of [Getting Started as a Small Group Leader](#) (available at www.saltchurch.info/resources/small-group-leaders). There are dozens of tips there on how to use a social week to intentionally grow your Small Group.

DO YOUR OWN BIBLE DISCUSSION:

Alternatively, if you want to continue a previous discussion or dig into another topic / question / part of the bible here's how you could do that...

Getting Ideas: A week before, let your group know there's a 'choose your own' week coming up. Collect ideas, like a topic / question / part of the bible they want to explore. Vote to find the most popular 1 & get prepping.

Getting Prepped: Brainstorm where in the bible the topic / question comes up. Or for a part of the bible, read it a bunch of times to work out what it means. Ask your coach & other leaders if they know good places to go / what the passage means. If you're more experienced at this you can read a systematic theology or commentary (there's a bunch upstairs at 275 Keira St you can borrow). Plus, if you're keen to learn more about how to create studies, check out [Writing a Small Group Study](#) by Richard Sweatman.

Packaging a Discussion: Here's 3 options...

1. Use the COMA method: ask the group what's the *Context* | what you *Observe* | what you think it *Means* | how you think it *Applies* to us.
2. Use the [Swedish Method](#) to read the passage & ask [these questions](#):
 - a. What stands out to you?
 - b. What's a question you have?
 - c. What do you think the big point is?
 - d. What do you think this will mean for your life?
 - e. What from this passage can you share with someone else?
3. Just read a passage, ask 'what do you reckon?' & see where you go.

NEED HELP?

You don't have to have all the answers or be the expert to be a Small Group Leader, so don't stress out for this week. Just get people into God's word & let Him teach & transform us by His Spirit. Your Small Group Coach is always available & ready to give you help too.

1 COR 4:1-7 • 24-30 JUNE

DIRECTION: Confident judgementalism of ourselves or others doesn't mesh with knowing God will judge accurately. And confident boasting doesn't mesh with being those who receive everything from God. How different is this to Jesus, who humbles and entrusts himself to his Father.

PRAY: *"Search me, God, & know my heart; test me & know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, & lead me in the way everlasting."* (Psalm 139:23-24)

LAUNCH: → What was one of your greatest achievements in school?

READ: 1 Corinthians 4:1-7

OBSERVATION:

→ What emoji captures how you think Paul feels, based on 4:1-5.

→ What emoji captures how you think Paul wants the Corinthian Christians to feel, based on 4:6-7.



I'd go this (left) for 4:1-5 as he isn't worried about their judgement of him; and this (right) for 4:6-7 as he wants them to stop boasting of what they have/know and to praise God instead.



MEANING:

→ Instead of saying "I follow Paul" (1:12) and aligning themselves with Christian leaders, how does Paul want them to see and treat him?

As simply servants of Jesus who have an amazing powerful message to share.

→ Why do you think Paul tells them not to judge him?

They're Jesus' servants so their master is the 1 to judge them. Rom 13:3-4 "who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall."

→ What do we learn about God's judgement?

He will certainly judge. He'll judge Christians and unbelievers. It'll be accurate, more accurate than even our consciences. The "court-date" so to speak has already been appointed: it'll happen when Jesus returns. His judgement is comprehensive, factoring in hidden motives. He'll give praise to faithful followers.

→ Why are we badly suited to judge even ourselves, yet alone others?

Unlike God, we don't judge comprehensively or accurately. Even if our conscience is clear we might still not be innocent.

→ Should Christians be scared of God's judgement? Why, why not?

We don't need to fear for our salvation, as that's based on Christ's perfect obedience in our place (see for e.g. Rev 20:11-15). But God's judgement is 1 of the motivators in the NT for Christians to live godly lives. That's the case for Paul here, and see also 1 Cor 3:10-15; 1 Peter 1:17-21 and 4:17-19; Matthew 25:21; 2 Cor 5:10-11.

++ Paul speaks of his conscience in 4:4. How would you define conscience?

Our awareness of what we believe is right and wrong at any given moment in time.

++ What is useful about our conscience? What are its limits?

It's a guide to what we believe is right and wrong; but that doesn't necessarily mean it's what God says is right and wrong. It needs to be constantly re-calibrated against God's word for it to be accurate and so useful. See also Acts 24:16; Romans 2:15, 13:5; 1 Cor 8:7-12, 10:25-29; 1 Tim 4:1-2; Hebrews 13:8.

→ Read **Phil 2:5-8**, **1 Peter 2:21-23**. How is Jesus the perfect model to us?

Rather than boast of what he had, he gave it up and humbled himself. Even when he's accused falsely, he entrusts himself and judgement of him to his Father.

APPLY:

→ Why does it make no sense for us to boast in what we have or know?

→ We're saved by grace alone through faith. But as we carry on living the Christian life, we can be tempted to think we've racked up some runs on the board. How does this passage correct us?

→ Do you care too much about the judgements and opinions of others? How could you learn to care less and to value God's opinion more?

→ How could we stop, either self-criticising or self-praising, and leave judgement of us up to God?

PRAY TO END: Thank you for the perfect model of Jesus, and the perfect obedience he won for us. Help us to imitate him by your power.

1 COR 4:8-17 • 1-7 JULY

DIRECTION: Their divisions would be solved if they'd only imitate Paul.

With the worldly standards they're using, Paul isn't who they want him to be and they think they're better than him. But in fact, Paul is living the way all Christians ought to live. He's glad to be pathetic in the world's eyes since human wisdom is so dumb compared to God's wisdom.

PRAY: For the courage to see the world God's way and live in light of it.

LAUNCH:

→ Split your group in 2 and debate this, 1 side agreeing, 1 disagreeing:
"You can't be a godly Christian and be liked by unbelievers too."

READ: 1 Corinthians 4:8-17

OBSERVATION:

→ In v8 & v10 do you think Paul is saying true things or being sarcastic?

The fact he immediately corrects what he says in v8 (I wish you really had begun to reign) shows he's being sarcastic.

→ Why does Paul say all this to them?

To warn them of how dangerous the way they're seeing him and the world is, so they might imitate him instead (4:14-16).

→ How are the apostles treated or seen? How do they respond?

| How they're treated or seen ? | Their response? |
|---|----------------------------|
| v9 prisoners about to die in the Colosseum | v12 when cursed they bless |
| v10 fools for following Christ, weak & dishonoured | v12 enduring persecution |
| v11 hungry, thirsty, naked, homeless, treated badly | v13 kind when slandered |
| v13 the scum of the earth, garbage of the world | |

MEANING:

→ How would this description of the apostles help the Corinthians to stop aligning themselves behind different apostles?

They're trying to get respect via associating themselves with impressive powerful apostles. But Paul says the apostles are anything but powerful, impressive and respectable in the world's eyes – they're the scum of the earth to the world's eyes! So, in pursuing human wisdom and power, they are, in effect, claiming to be better than Paul (and the apostles) who gave them Jesus and is their spiritual father.

→ Do you think this description of the apostles is a good description of what the Christian life should look like for all Christians? Why yes, why no?

We're called to imitate Paul and the apostles in this – as they imitate Jesus.

++ Read **John 15:18-20, John 16:33 and 2 Timothy 3:12**. How do these verses expand on or flesh out this same idea?

APPLY:

→ Are you surprised when the world hates you or unbelievers reject you?

→ In what ways is your life similar to Paul's life? Different? Why is that?

→ What do you think of this quote (from Steve McAlpine, *Being the Bad Guys*):

"The church used to be recognised as a force for good, but this is changing rapidly. Christians are now often seen as the bad guys..."

→ As hostility towards Christians ramps up in Australia, how is Paul's example a rebuke to you? A relief for you?

A rebuke: our lives don't look much like Paul's! That could be God's kindness that persecution is limited in Australia, or could be that we're wimping out in standing up for Jesus, or a mix of both.

A relief: When we face persecution it's not because we're doing something wrong (though 1 Peter 2:20 tells us to check for our sin) – we're in good company!

→ The tag-line for our 1 Corinthians series is: *"living for God in a world that isn't"*. From 1 Corinthians 1-4 what's most challenged you? Comforted you?

PRAY TO END: Thank God for all he's taught us in 1 Corinthians 1-4. Ask for his help to embrace this way of life that he has called us to.



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To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ – their Lord and ours...

1 Corinthians 1:2