



MARCH • APRIL • MAY
DAILY DEVOTIONS

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Dear Family of Faith,

When we think of the past, we tend to do so in one of two ways. The first way is nostalgia. We look to the past as the good old days that have gone by, never to come again. Just because it is the past, we think of it as a time inherently better than the time we currently live in. The other way we think about the past is what C. S. Lewis calls “chronological snobbery.”¹ This is when we think of the past as inherently inferior to the present just because it is the past. We consider the cultures, practices, peoples, and ideas of old as less sophisticated and moral than those of the present. While there are, of course, flaws to both of these approaches to the past, it is important to recognize them because they are the most common ways in which the church of today thinks about the church of old, the New Testament church.

The next thirteen weeks will find us studying Paul’s letters to the Corinthians. As you are introduced to this New Testament church in Corinth, you will be tempted to fall into one of the two extreme approaches to the past described above. A common refrain among members of the contemporary church is, “If only we could be like the New Testament church; if only we were holy and had faith like they did.” Yet another common refrain, especially when we read about churches like the church in Corinth, is, “Boy, the Corinthians were really messed up. Thank God we are not like they were.” Both of these approaches have their flaws. Paul’s letters to the Corinthians introduce us to a church that had major problems. They struggled with pride, interpersonal strife, sexual immorality, idolatry, and much more. But the point of God allowing us to see the brokenness within the Corinthian church is not for us to turn our noses up at it, but rather to closely examine ourselves to discern whether some of the same sinful tendencies exist in our own hearts! Undoubtedly, many of us will experience the conviction of the Holy Spirit if we earnestly examine ourselves in this way. And when we do experience this conviction, Paul’s letters to the Corinthians will also offer us much hope in Christ. For as broken as the church in Corinth was, and as broken as the church of today is, Paul describes the church of God as “those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours” (1 Corinthians 1:2).

May God bless you as you dive into this study of 1 and 2 Corinthians. “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Corinthians 13:14).

List of Lessons

Sunday	Lesson Title	Scripture
March 4	United in Christ	1 Corinthians 1:10-25
March 11	Glorifying God	1 Corinthians 6:12-20
March 18	Keeping Commitments	1 Corinthians 7:1-13
March 25	Influencing For Christ	1 Corinthians 9:19-27; 10:31-33; 11:1
April 1	Assurance of the Resurrection	John 20:3-9; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28
April 8	Remembering the Sacrifice	1 Corinthians 11:17-29
April 15	Serving God's People	1 Corinthians 12:4-12, 21-26
April 22	Understanding Love	1 Corinthians 13:1-13
April 29	Enjoying God's Comfort	2 Corinthians 1:3-14
May 6	Displaying the Gospel	2 Corinthians 4:5-18
May 13	Becoming New	2 Corinthians 5:16-21; 6:1-2
May 20	Giving Faithfully	2 Corinthians 9:1-15
May 27	Finding Strength	2 Corinthians 12:7b-10; 13:2-8

WEEK OF
FEBRUARY 26, 2018

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us
who are being saved it is the power of God.
1 Corinthians 1:18



MONDAY
FEB
26

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

MAIN IDEA

Paul greets the Corinthians with love, compassion, and thanksgiving.

As Baptists, we understand fairly well how important a greeting is. For this very reason, most Baptist churches have a greeting committee of some sort whose sole purpose is to think through and execute the greeting of members and guests during church services. When we greet someone, it accomplishes at least three purposes: 1) it gives us an opportunity to show that “someone” who we are; 2) it gives us an opportunity to tell that “someone” who he or she is to us; 3) it gives us an opportunity to show that “someone” our heart for him or her. In Paul’s greeting of the Corinthians, he accomplishes all three of those purposes:

1. Paul shows the Corinthians that he is an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. He speaks to them with the very authority of Jesus Christ.
2. He declares the Corinthians to whom he writes to be the church of God, sanctified by Jesus Christ and called to be saints along with all other Christians from all times and places.
3. He bestows three blessings upon the Corinthians that show his heart for them: grace from God, peace from God, and thanks to God. Paul wants the Corinthians to experience God’s grace and peace, and he thanks God for the grace that the Corinthians have already received.

As we think through Paul’s greeting and thanksgiving in these verses, may we be encouraged not only to view the Corinthian church in light of Paul’s words, but to also view our own church in like manner!

- In what tone does Paul begin his letter to the Corinthians? What does this say about Paul’s heart for the Corinthians?

- How do you typically communicate with your fellow Christians? How can Paul’s greeting and thanksgiving inform the way you communicate with others?

PRAY

Thank God for the church. Ask God that He would help you to communicate with your fellow church members with love and compassion. Spend some time asking God to bestow His grace and peace on specific members of your church, and also spend some time thanking God for the work He is doing in the lives of specific members of your church.

**TUESDAY
FEB
27**

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

MAIN IDEA

Paul criticizes the Corinthians for devoting themselves to human preachers rather than Christ.

Has someone ever asked you, “Who is your favorite preacher?” While there is nothing inherently wrong in this question, or in having a favorite preacher, there is much danger in attaching our faith or devotion to mortal men rather than God. This is the theme of today’s passage. While Paul began his letter with a very gracious introduction, he now delivers some hard words concerning some problems within the Corinthian church. According to “Chloe’s people,” there were some major quarreling and divisions in the church over which itinerant preacher was superior. There were some vying for Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and/or Christ. The issue is self-evident: the Corinthians were placing mortal men on the same level as their Lord Jesus Christ. Some were following the teachings of Paul, others Apollos, others Cephas, and others Christ. Paul responds strongly to this error, mocking the supposition that he or any other preacher could be compared with Christ. Thereafter, he points the Corinthians to the true source of their faith and salvation: the cross of Jesus Christ. As we ponder these verses, may we be reminded of the timeless words of Edward Mote: “On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand; all other ground is sinking sand.”²

- How does Paul’s tone in today’s passage differ from his tone in yesterday’s passage?

- Have you ever had an issue with being too devoted to a particular Christian preacher or musician? How does today’s passage help to reorient your devotion toward Christ?

PRAY

Confess to the Lord any devotion that you hold in your heart toward mortal man rather than God. Ask God to help orient all of your desires and devotions toward Him. Thank Him for Jesus Christ, your Lord and your King, who died for you so that you could have eternal life with Him.

MAIN IDEA

Paul shows how the heart of God’s wisdom is the cross of Jesus Christ.

Wisdom, for ancient Corinth, was exemplified in one group of people: the Sophists. These were the master orators and debaters of the day, who not only drew large crowds with their eloquent speeches but also drew a hefty profit. John Bunyan’s description of his character, Talkative, describes them well: “all he hath lieth in his tongue, and his Religion is to make a noise therewith.”³ Paul, however, comes to the Corinthians with something utterly different: “the word of the cross” (1 Corinthians 1:18). This word, though it is foolish to those who are perishing, is in truth the power of God. This is why, when Paul came to the Corinthians, though in terms of academic training and intellectual girth he could have gone toe-to-toe with the Sophists, he decided to know nothing among them “except Christ and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). Paul knew that this message wouldn’t make him popular; but he also knew that true life transformation only comes through Spirit-empowered proclamation, and such proclamation only comes through the faithful proclamation of the gospel. So, let us not be dazzled by the latest TED Talk or astounded by the freshest Bible-less preacher; rather, let us come with open hearts and open minds to the well-spring of God’s Word and the great fountain of the gospel, and let us drink deeply.

- How does Paul describe wisdom? From what you can tell from the context, how does Paul’s kind of wisdom differ from the kind of wisdom the Corinthians were used to?

- Do you tend to get caught up in the latest fads or intellectual trends? How might this passage help to steady your heart and mind?

PRAY

Thank God for “the word of the cross.” Thank Him for the power of the gospel that brought you from death to life. Ask Him to help you shamelessly and boldly proclaim this Word everywhere that you go.



MAIN IDEA

Paul teaches the Corinthians that Christ is the sustainer and foundation of the church.

In yesterday's passage, Paul describes the core of God's wisdom as "the word of the cross." In today's passage, he applies that wisdom to the life of the church. As we have already noted, the church in Corinth was divided because various cliques were rallying behind different preachers. Paul's criticism of these actions is very simple; he says, "You are thinking in merely human terms, not divine terms" (1 Corinthians 3:1-4). They are not thinking with "the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16), but with the mind of Adam. But in terms of what builds, steadies, and sustains the church of God, mortal men are of little account. Sure, they plant and water, but it is God who gives the growth (1 Corinthians 3:5-9). And surely they lay the foundation upon which the church is built, but neither they nor any other thing made by mortal man could ever be the foundation, or the church would crumble in ruins; rather, Christ Himself is the foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11). Therefore, reasons Paul, no mortal man has any cause to boast in himself. Instead, may we all boast in Christ, who is Lord and King of our hearts, and the giver and sustainer of our faith!

- How does Paul describe the church in this passage? What are the different elements that make up the "building" of the church that Paul describes?

- How do you view the church? Do you see it as built by, run by, and dependent upon mortal men? How might this passage alter your perspective of the church?

PRAY

Thank God for the church. Thank Him that Christ died for the church, to cleanse her and make her holy, without spot or blemish. Ask God that He would help you love and serve your church.



MAIN IDEA

Paul teaches that the minister of Jesus Christ must be a faithful servant and steward.

One of the most interesting characters in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Return of the King* is Denethor, the steward of Gondor. Within the storyline, the line of kings had all but died out, and the rule of the great city Gondor was left to a line of stewards in their stead. Denethor, though, described as a “proud and subtle” man,⁴ eventually lets his pride get to his head and tragically attempts to rule Gondor as its monarch. His is the classic story of an unfaithful steward. In 1 Corinthians 4, Paul describes his ministry in terms of faithful stewardship (1 Corinthians 4:1-2). He teaches that ministers of the Lord Jesus Christ are not themselves lords or kings but servants and stewards of the great Lord and King. They care for the precious mysteries of God with which they have been entrusted, and primarily the mystery of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Moreover, they serve their Lord faithfully, toiling for the sake of His people and His glory. The responsibility of the minister of the gospel is great: It is required that he be found faithful. As we head into the weekend and Sunday worship, may we be intentional about encouraging and thanking our ministers for the great gospel work that they do and the example that they set.

- How does Paul describe his ministry in this chapter?

- How do you usually perceive the ministers under whom God has placed you? How can this passage of Scripture shape your understanding of what it is to be a minister?

PRAY

Thank God for your ministers. Pray for them, and ask God that He would encourage them, keep them, and help them to endure through the trials of ministry.

As you reflect on your personal study throughout the week, choose one verse or passage that particularly stood out to you.

- Why was this verse or passage so meaningful to you?

- In what areas of your life do these truths apply?

- In what ways do you plan to put the truths you've observed this week into practice?

Family Focus: Take the verse or passage that stood out to you and think about how you can share it with your family. How does it apply to your husband, wife, son, or daughter? For singles or students, think about how it applies to your friends or parents. Commit to share this passage with a family member or friend today.

Tomorrow our lesson is **United in Christ** from 1 Corinthians 1:10-25. Review these verses to prepare your heart and pray for your teacher.

WEEK OF
MARCH 5, 2018

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.
1 Corinthians 6:19-20

MONDAY
MARCH
5

1 Corinthians 5:1-13

MAIN IDEA

Upon the report of crass sexual immorality in the Corinthian church, Paul prescribes decisive action for the purity of the church.

In this short chapter Paul brings to light one of the more scandalous cases of sexual immorality recorded in Scripture. Things were happening among the church in Corinth that were “not tolerated even among the pagans” (1 Corinthians 5:1). For Paul to say this in the context of Corinth is remarkable, as Corinth was perhaps the most sexually immoral and pornographic city in the ancient world. Even more scandalous to Paul than the sin itself, however, is the Corinthians’ boasting in the sin. Paul’s prescribed action in response to the sin is decisive: “Let him who has done this be removed from among you” (1 Corinthians 5:2). While this may seem harsh, Paul is motivated by love for the Corinthian church. He knows that a little leaven leavens the whole lump; if this sexual immorality persists in the church, it will eventually corrupt the whole. Christ is serious about the purity of His church; He washes her in the Word and will one day present her to Himself without spot or blemish. May we look forward in hope to this glorious day, and may we allow texts such as 1 Corinthians 5 to remind us of how glorious that day will truly be!

- How does Paul respond to the report of sexual immorality in the church at Corinth?

- How can today’s passage inform your perspective of the church? How can you work toward the purity of the church today?

PRAY

Thank God for the church. Thank Him for the promised day when His church will be without spot and blemish, completely sanctified. Ask God for that day to come, and to come quickly!



MAIN IDEA

Paul encourages the Corinthians to live both in the world and unstained from the world.

Yesterday we considered how Paul's response to incest within the Corinthian church points us forward to the day when Jesus will cleanse His church of all spot or blemish. Until that day, though, how ought the church of God live in this sinful world? Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 5 answers this question also. He echoes the words of Jesus, when during His high priestly ministry He prays to the Father, "I do not ask that You take them out of the world, but that You keep them from the evil one" (John 17:15). Jesus does not want us to "go out of the world" (1 Corinthians 5:10), but He does want us to be "unstained by the world" (James 1:27). He wants us to be aliens in this world, living in a place that is not our home and where we don't quite fit in. Why? He wants us to be a witness, a light shining in a dark place. For the church to be a witness, though, she must be pure, which is why Paul takes this case of sexual immorality within the church so seriously. It is not that the Corinthians shouldn't associate with sexually immoral people, but that they shouldn't relate with a sexually immoral person who names the name of Christ. The dangers of such a person are two-fold: 1) with Christ on his lips and open sin in his life, he defiles the name of Christ; 2) his sexual immorality is like leaven that leavens the whole lumps, spreading and corrupting. May we strive to be faithful witnesses to the transforming power of the gospel of Christ by striving for the purity of His church!

- How does Paul describe the life of the church in this world?

- What is your relationship with the world? Do you tend to hide from the world within strictly Christian circles? How can this passage impact the way you relate to the world?

PRAY

Thank God that He has placed you in this world for a purpose: to be His ambassador to plead for lost sinners to follow Christ. Pray that you would be a witness in your workplace and neighborhood. Pray also that your church would be a witness in your community and city.

MAIN IDEA

Paul speaks a strong word regarding the disunity within the Corinthian church.

After dealing with the issue of sexual immorality within the Corinthian church, Paul turns to another issue: there were several cases within the church in which brothers and sisters in Christ were suing each other over civil matters. Paul doesn't pull any punches in his condemnation of this behavior: "To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you" (1 Corinthians 6:7). For Paul, the issue is very similar to the previous one of sexual immorality. The Corinthians, while naming the name of Christ with their lips, are not displaying His character with their lives. They have forgotten the power of forgiveness that is found in the gospel; they are like the unforgiving servant, who was offered much grace but showed none in turn. Paul is dumbfounded: "Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers!" (1 Corinthians 6:8). As we consider Paul's strong, heavy words in this passage, may our minds turn to our Lord Jesus Christ, who suffered wrong and was defrauded on our behalf. May we now in turn be willing to suffer wrong for the sake of our brothers and sisters in Christ, and ultimately for the sake of the gospel and its fame among the nations.

- How does Paul respond to the disunity within the Corinthian church?

- Can you think of any strained relationships in your life right now? In particular, are you at odds with a brother or sister in Christ? In light of this text, how should you respond to that brother or sister?

PRAY

Thank God for the great humility of Christ. Thank Him that He who knew no sin became sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God. Thank Him that He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant. Thank Him that He suffered harm and was defrauded on our behalf. Ask God that He would give you the resolve and strength to suffer harm and be defrauded for the sake of your brothers and sisters in Christ, and for the sake of the gospel.

MAIN IDEA

Paul instructs the Corinthians to flee sexual immorality.

Two strong calls to action dominate today's reading: 1) "Flee sexual immorality" (1 Corinthians 6:18) and 2) "So glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:20). Today we will discuss the first command and tomorrow the second. So why should we "flee sexual immorality" as Paul plainly and forcibly directs us? Elsewhere in Scripture we are told to resist, such as when James tells us to "resist the devil" (James 4:7), so why does Paul here instruct us to flee? Paul's answer to this question appears in 1 Corinthians 6:13: "The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body." As followers of Jesus Christ, as those who have been brought from death to life, we have been united with our Lord Jesus Christ. We have become one spirit with Him (1 Corinthians 6:17), and therefore our bodies have become His body. And since sexual immorality is a sin against the body (1 Corinthians 6:18), sexual immorality is a very particular sin against Christ. We belong, body and soul, in both life and death, to our Lord Jesus Christ. May we live as such today!

- What is the first main command that Paul gives to the Corinthians in this passage? Why in particular does he give this command?

- Have you committed sexual sin lately? How would the Lord have you respond to this sin? What steps do you need to take toward repentance?

PRAY

Praise God for union with Christ. Thank Him that because of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for our sins we have become one spirit with Him. Ask God to help you live in a way that reflects this glorious reality.



MAIN IDEA

Paul instructs the Corinthians to glorify God in their bodies.

Yesterday we discussed the first major command in this passage: “Flee from sexual immorality” (1 Corinthians 6:18). Today we discuss the second: “So glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:20). Paul’s logic for this command is a bit less complex than the first, but no less powerful: “You are not your own, for you were bought with a price” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Individuality is a hallmark of our American culture. We take much pride in personal autonomy and the freedom that such autonomy entails. But did you know that this autonomy is a myth? You are not your own; that is what this passage is saying—you are not your own. Even before you trusted in Christ, and you perhaps had delusions of ruling your own life, you were not your own. Your desires and lusts drove you, controlled you, and enslaved you. But when Christ saved you, He gave you something more glorious than you could ever have imagined, something infinitely better than personal autonomy: You were bought with a price. You were helpless, enslaved, and an enemy of God (Romans 5:6-11), until one day, God had mercy on you and broke you from your bonds through faith in Jesus Christ. How was this possible? There was only one way: the debt of sin had to be paid. And so Christ went to Calvary, He bled and died on a tree, and He paid the ultimate ransom price that set you eternally free from the bondage of sin. Praise God today that you were bought with a price! May the Lord give you grace and direction as you seek to glorify Him in your body!

- What is the second main command that Paul gives to the Corinthians in this passage? Why in particular does he give this command?

- Have you ever intentionally glorified God in your body? What does that look like? How do you plan to put this into practice today, tomorrow, next week?

PRAY

Praise God that your Lord Jesus bought you with a price. Plead with God that He would empower you to live a life worthy of these great realities of the gospel we have discussed today.



**SATURDAY
MARCH
10**

As you reflect on your personal study throughout the week, choose one verse or passage that particularly stood out to you.

- Why was this verse or passage so meaningful to you?

- In what areas of your life do these truths apply?

- In what ways do you plan to put the truths you've observed this week into practice?

Family Focus: Take the verse or passage that stood out to you and think about how you can share it with your family. How does it apply to your husband, wife, son, or daughter? For singles or students, think about how it applies to your friends or parents. Commit to share this passage with a family member or friend today.

Tomorrow our lesson is **Glorifying God** from 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. Review these verses to prepare your heart and pray for your teacher.

WEEK OF
MARCH 12, 2018

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. *1 Corinthians 7:17*

MONDAY
MARCH
12

1 Corinthians 7:1-16

MAIN IDEA

Paul teaches the Corinthians about the nature of marriage.

On June 26, 2015, the United States Supreme Court, in the case of *Obergefell v. Hodges*, reshaped the definition of marriage for the American people by legalizing same-sex marriage. We live in an age of confusion, and the confusion is both wide and deep. In its wideness, it reaches almost every area of our lives; in its deepness, it infiltrates the very core of how we view ourselves and those around us. So when it comes to the particular topic of marriage, how should we as Christians respond to the chaos surrounding us? While a few responses may be appropriate, the first and most important is for us to turn to our Bibles. When we look to 1 Corinthians 7, we find a strikingly clear description of the nature of marriage: “each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband” (1 Corinthians 7:2). This is a description that Paul pulls directly from Genesis 2: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). In Ephesians 5 Paul calls this relationship a profound mystery. This basic relationship, which is fundamental to life, culture, and family, is also glorious. And the reason it is glorious is because “it refers to Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:32). The loving submission of a wife to her husband pictures the loving submission of the church to Christ, and the sacrificial love of a husband for his wife illustrates the sacrificial love of Christ for His church. Therefore, the way that we view marriage is directly related to the way we view the gospel. May we turn to Scripture today and allow our view of the world, our view of society, and our view of ourselves to be shaped and molded by the power of the Holy Spirit!

- How does Paul describe the nature of marriage in this passage?

- What was your response to the recent Supreme Court ruling? How does this particular passage help to shape your view of marriage and personhood?

PRAY

Thank God for marriage! Thank Him that it is a profound mystery that refers to Christ and the church. Ask God that He would help your mind be shaped by the truths of Scripture and not the confusion of the world.

MAIN IDEA

Paul identifies humility as the cornerstone for sexual unity within the marriage relationship.

Have you ever fought with your spouse? Have you ever wondered, perhaps during or after the fight, how things got so out of hand, or why you responded the way that you did? Scripture gives us a clear answer to this question: "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and you do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask" (James 4:1-2). Fighting and quarreling, then, sprout from a selfish, prideful heart. C. S. Lewis said that "pride always means enmity—it is enmity."⁵ With these truths about relationships in mind, it is remarkable how Paul identifies humility as the cornerstone of sexual unity within the marriage relationship. He says, "The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does" (1 Corinthians 7:3-4). Do you see what Paul is doing here? He looks to the wife and says, "You are not your own; you belong to your husband." Then, he looks to the husband and says, "You are not your own; you belong to your wife." Husband, do not think about yourself, but about your wife! Wife, do not think about yourself, but about your husband! There is no greater mark of humility than self-forgetfulness. Moreover, there is no greater unifying virtue in a marriage relationship or any other relationship! So, husband, wife, friend, family member, may you drink deeply from this well of Christ-like humility today!

- How does Paul describe a healthy marriage relationship? What kind of characteristics mark it?

- If you are married, what specific details from this passage can you apply to your marriage today? If you are not married, how can the principles laid out in this passage help you to live in peace among all men?

PRAY

Thank God for marriage! Thank Him for the gift of humility, which could only ever come to us through the transforming power of the gospel of Jesus Christ, who humbled Himself for us by taking the form of a servant. Pray that you would display humility in your marriage and in your relationships with others as well.

MAIN IDEA

Paul roots our identity in our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Who are you? Though this question is very common and most of us have a stock two-minute response for it, it is also one of the deepest questions someone can ask you. What defines you as a human being? Is it your name, your job, your marital status, your ministry involvement, or your hobby? When you answer the question, “Who are you,” do you find yourself giving a summary of these portions of life? In today’s passage, Paul instructs the Corinthians to base their identity not in their various stages of life or social standing, but in God. He sums it up in verse 24: “So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.” Your station in life, whatever it may be, is not as important as the fact that God has called you to it. You are a child of God, bought with the precious blood of Christ and freed from the eternal consequences of sin. These wondrous truths now form the core of your identity—they are who you are. What your name is, your vocation, your spouse and children, and everything else is secondary to your identity in Christ.

- How does Paul instruct us to view the present circumstances of our lives?

- How do you answer the question, “Who are you?” How might today’s passage influence the way you answer this question in the future?

PRAY

Thank God for the redemption that is ours in Christ Jesus. Thank Him that you can find your identity in Him. Thank Him for being your immutable Rock in whom, though all else fails, you can have eternal confidence. Ask Him to help you more intentionally root your identity in Him.

MAIN IDEA

Paul teaches that singleness affords unique opportunities to love God.

In the first half of 1 Corinthians 7 Paul gives some very particular instruction to married couples. In today's reading, though he follows up with a bit more instruction to those who are married; he primarily addresses those who are single. His main point is this: singleness affords unique opportunities to devote your life to God and to glorify Him. While the married man is anxious about his family life, the "unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord" (1 Corinthians 7:32). Likewise, while the married woman is anxious about pleasing her husband, the "unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit" (1 Corinthians 7:34). While Paul, under the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit, is certainly not against the divinely established institution of marriage, singles should give weight to Paul's words here. Perhaps your singleness is just for a season, or perhaps it is for life; either way, God speaks to you and tells you that this station in life affords you unique opportunities to serve Him and love Him. Take these opportunities and run with them! As Paul says, they are for your benefit, to "secure your undivided devotion to the Lord" (1 Corinthians 7:35).

- How does Paul describe marriage and singleness in this passage?

- Are you married or single? How can today's passage help you to gain a fresh perspective on your current station in life?

PRAY

Thank God for marriage and singleness. Thank Him for your particular stage of life. Thank Him for the opportunities He has given you to love Him, serve Him, and glorify His name. Ask Him to help you take advantage of your current station of life for His glory and for the advancement of His kingdom.



MAIN IDEA

Paul teaches that the choice to marry or not to marry is a matter of godly wisdom.

In his book *Just Do Something*, pastor Kevin DeYoung draws a way which many evangelicals think about the will of God and a Magic 8-Ball: “God is not a Magic 8-Ball we shake up and peer into whenever we have a decision to make. He is a good God who gives us brains, shows us the way of obedience, and invites us to take risks for Him.”⁶ In some ways, Paul’s instruction to those who are contemplating marriage is similar: “Now concerning the betrothed, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy” (1 Corinthians 7:25). “So then he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better” (1 Corinthians 7:38). As we discussed yesterday, those contemplating marriage should seriously consider the spiritual benefits of singleness that Paul describes; at the same time, however, Paul clearly sees this issue as a matter of wisdom. If you are a single person contemplating marriage, here are some questions to ask yourself: 1) How will I most glorify God, through singleness or marriage? 2) How will I best remain pure, through singleness or marriage? 3) How will I best serve the church, through singleness or marriage? 4) How can I best devote myself to the Lord, through singleness or marriage?

- How does Paul describe the choice of whether or not to marry in this passage?

- How do you typically make decisions? How do you normally determine the will of God for your life? How can this passage help you to think through decision making and God’s will for your life?

PRAY

Thank God for His sovereignty over your life. Thank Him, also, that He has freed you from sin so that you can make godly decisions for the ultimate purpose of His glory. Ask Him, that in whatever decisions you currently have in your life, He would help you to honor Him and bring glory to His name.

As you reflect on your personal study throughout the week, choose one verse or passage that particularly stood out to you.

- Why was this verse or passage so meaningful to you?

- In what areas of your life do these truths apply?

- In what ways do you plan to put the truths you've observed this week into practice?

Family Focus: Take the verse or passage that stood out to you and think about how you can share it with your family. How does it apply to your husband, wife, son, or daughter? For singles or students, think about how it applies to your friends or parents. Commit to share this passage with a family member or friend today.

Tomorrow our lesson is **Keeping Commitments** from 1 Corinthians 7:1-13. Review these verses to prepare your heart and pray for your teacher.

WEEK OF
MARCH 19, 2018

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.
1 Corinthians 10:31

MONDAY
MARCH
19

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

MAIN IDEA

Paul challenges the Corinthians to operate out of love, not selfishness.

Paul now moves on to the next issue plaguing the Corinthian church: the debate over food sacrificed to idols. The first party of this debate believed that the food used in pagan ritual ceremonies was sacrificed to real idols and therefore found it sinful to eat it; the second party believed rightly that the idols were false and that the food sacrificed to them was no more evil or impure than any other food. While Paul agrees with the second party that there is nothing inherently wrong with eating food sacrificed to idols, he recasts the entire debate in terms of love. While it may not be inherently wrong to eat this food sacrificed to idols, it may be unloving to do so if it causes other “weaker” brothers and sisters to stumble. While we don’t have an issue with food sacrificed to idols in our culture, the principles behind this debate certainly apply. The essential question that Paul raises is this: which is more important to you, your freedom to partake of this particular substance or the souls of your brothers and sisters? The loving response to this question goes without saying. So then, the question for you today is this: What are you willing to give up for the sake of your brother or sister’s soul? May God empower us to love the church earnestly and sacrificially!

- How does Paul frame the debate regarding food sacrificed to idols?

- Have you ever been in a situation where you have had to forsake a rightful liberty for the sake of someone else? How does today’s passage influence your perspective of your own personal freedom in relation to other people?

PRAY

Thank God that He loved us with a sacrificial love, sending His own Son to die in our place. Pray that He would also give you a sacrificial love and that you would be willing to sacrifice your own personal freedoms for the sake of others.

MAIN IDEA

Paul testifies how he has given up his rights for the sake of the gospel.

After encouraging a group of believers within the Corinthian church to give up their right to eat food sacrificed to idols for the sake of another group for whom this practice was a stumbling block, Paul offers his own conduct as a testimony. As an apostle of God and a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ, he argues, he is entitled to some rights, such as having a “believing wife” (1 Corinthians 9:5) and making his “living by the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:14). He makes his purpose for forsaking these rights very clear: “Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ” (1 Corinthians 9:12). And again, he says, “For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them” (1 Corinthians 9:19). In this passage Paul testifies that the gospel, and the transforming power of the gospel in people’s lives, is the most important thing to him. It is more important than his liberty, his comfort, or his own well-being. Paul knows that his own present sufferings are nothing compared to the eternal suffering of those who die without the gospel; thus, he is willing to make massive sacrifices for the sake of its spread. May we learn to be like Paul in this regard; may we be willing to hold loosely to our comforts and possessions, while holding tightly to the glorious, brilliant truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. May we go and share, not just the gospel of God, but our very lives! (1 Thessalonians 2:8)

- What does Paul describe about his own life and ministry in this passage?

- What is your relationship like with comfort and possessions? Is there any way that these things hinder your effectiveness in gospel ministry? How might today’s passage help you to reprioritize your life?

PRAY

Thank God for the glorious truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ! Ask Him that He would help you to do all for the sake of the gospel and to be willing to give up anything for the sake of its spread among the nations.

MAIN IDEA

The history of Israel was written down for our instruction.

The story of Martin Luther's first major encounter with God is striking, to say the least. Twenty-one year old Luther was on his way home one day when a severe thunderstorm came upon him. As he fought through the storm, a bolt of lightning struck the ground very near to him. "Help me, St. Anne!" he screamed. "I will become a monk!"⁷ Not long after this event, Luther withdrew from law school and joined the Augustinian Order of monks. This choice eventually led him to Wittenberg from where he would incite the Protestant Reformation. Oftentimes, the effects of spiritual events such as the one Luther experienced are short-lived in one's life; they may change a person's life drastically for a season, but after a while the shock wears off and the person goes back to what he was doing beforehand. While Luther was cut from a different mold in this regard, the Israelites certainly were not. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul describes how they experienced the miraculous events of the Exodus, the crossing of the Red Sea, the disbursement of manna, and the flowing of the water from the rock. Even still, with so much spiritual experience under their belts, most of them descended into idolatry and tested God. As a result, God disciplined them severely, sometimes even unto death. These events, Paul tells us, were written down for our instruction. God means us to study and meditate on the lives of the Israelites and the consequences of their sins, and He means for us to go down a different path. While the Israelites fell into their temptations, God desires for us to learn from their example, to lean on our faithful Lord, and to endure to the end. God has been so gracious to us by revealing Himself to us through His Word; may we take up and read, and learn from the example of those who have gone before us!

- How does Paul describe the history of Israel? What use does that history have for us today?

- How might today's reading influence the way you read the Old Testament? How might this passage help you during a time of temptation?

PRAY

Thank God for His Word. Thank Him that He has written down the history of Israel as instruction for us. Thank Him for His faithfulness and His commitment to always give you a way of escape from temptation. Ask Him that He would help you in your temptations and that you would take a different path than that of the Israelites.

MAIN IDEA

Paul calls the Corinthians to flee from idolatry.

Paul’s call to action in this passage is clear and concise: “flee from idolatry” (1 Corinthians 10:14). In the context of Corinth, this was a very practical and literal call to flee from participating in pagan rituals and sacrifices to demons. While such blatant idolatry might not be present in our context to such an extent, idolatry exists just as much today as it did in ancient Corinth. Brad Bigney, in his book *Gospel Treason*, defines an idol as “anything or anyone that captures our hearts, minds, and affections more than God.”⁸ In this sense, we are swimming in a sea of idols! But Paul gives the Corinthians a powerful reminder to help them in their flight from idolatry. He reminds them that their participation in the Lord’s Supper is a participation in the body and blood of Christ, a vivid reminder that we are united with Him in a death like His, that we may be raised up in a resurrection like His. By participating in the Lord’s Supper, we are proclaiming that we are one with Christ, that, as Paul says in Galatians, it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me (Galatians 2:20). How can those who are one with the Lord, who participate in His body and blood, then turn around to participate with demons? This is the travesty of idolatry. May we flee it with our whole hearts!

- How does Paul describe idolatry in this passage?

- How do you generally view idolatry? How can this passage inform your perspective on idolatry? How can this passage empower you to flee idolatry?

PRAY

Thank God for our union with Christ—that we are one with Him in His death and His resurrection. Thank Him that our sin died with Him and that we were raised with Him in newness of life. Ask God to help you flee from idolatry; ask Him to help you live in a manner that is consistent with the glorious reality of your salvation.



MAIN IDEA

Paul instructs the Corinthians to live for God’s glory.

Why do you exist? Why did God create you and why is He keeping you alive right now, at this moment in your life? These are big questions, so big that many of us don’t know where to start to find an answer to them. Scientists search the skies for the answer; biologists search the human genome, and philosophers search the collective wisdom of the ages. Yet we, as Christians, have a superior source of insight: God’s Holy Word. In it, we find a decisive answer to this question: we exist to glorify God. This is precisely what Paul teaches us at the close of today’s passage: so, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). Every single aspect of your life—from the grandiose to the mundane—is intended for one ultimate purpose: to glorify God. God is infinitely worthy of all the glory that this universe has to offer; if we don’t praise Him, the rocks will cry out! So wherever we are today, no matter what we’re doing or who we’re with, may we live for His glory!

- What is the context of Paul’s command to glorify God in all things?

- Do you intentionally focus on glorifying God throughout the day? How might this passage change the way you go about your day-to-day duties?

PRAY

Thank God for creating you for His glory. Thank God for saving you for His glory. Thank Him for orchestrating every single aspect of your life for His glory. Ask Him to help you live for His glory today.



SATURDAY
MARCH
24

As you reflect on your personal study throughout the week, choose one verse or passage that particularly stood out to you.

- Why was this verse or passage so meaningful to you?

- In what areas of your life do these truths apply?

- In what ways do you plan to put the truths you've observed this week into practice?

Family Focus: Take the verse or passage that stood out to you and think about how you can share it with your family. How does it apply to your husband, wife, son, or daughter? For singles or students, think about how it applies to your friends or parents. Commit to share this passage with a family member or friend today.

Tomorrow our lesson is **Influencing for Christ** from 1 Corinthians 9:19-27; 10:31-33; 11:1. Review these verses to prepare your heart and pray for your teacher.

WEEK OF
MARCH 26, 2018

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!"
And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.

John 19:30

MONDAY
MARCH
26

John 12:12 – 17:26

MAIN IDEA

Our joy on resurrection Sunday can be increased by experiencing the sorrow of Passion Week.

This coming Sunday will be glorious. We will go to church and celebrate the best news the world has ever known: Jesus is risen, and He is alive! While we are well practiced in celebrating the glory of the resurrection, our hearts are less trained in walking with Jesus through the gloom of Passion Week. About one-third of John's Gospel covers the period after Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem in John 12:12. Thereafter, the darkness of Passion Week begins to creep and crawl around the Light of the world. In John 13:21-30, Jesus reveals that one of His disciples will betray Him, and John concludes the section with an ominous description of the moment: "And it was night" (v. 30). We have asked you to read six chapters of Scripture today; these chapters are dark, and just as the Egyptians found during the plague of darkness, it is "a darkness to be felt" (Exodus 10:21). Our encouragement to you over the coming week is to walk with Jesus into the darkness and to feel it; it will not be pleasant, and Lord-willing it will weigh heavily on your heart. Why would you endure such an exercise? Because while "weeping may tarry for the night... joy comes with the morning" (Psalm 30:5), and "your sorrow will turn into joy" (John 16:20). The gloom of Passion Week is deep and dark; but the gloom of Passion Week gives way to the glory of the resurrection on Sunday morning. As we plunge into the depths of Monday through Saturday, our hearts will be preparing to soar on the heights of Sunday morning! May God bless you as you walk with Jesus this week.

- What kind of imagery do you see John using in these chapters? How might the imagery of these chapters signify the reality of the moment Jesus is in?

- What is the state of your heart after today's reading? How can the gloom of the Passion Week help your heart to turn toward Jesus?

PRAY

Thank God for the gloom of the Passion Week. Thank Him that He sent Jesus to suffer in every way just like us, yet without sin, so that He could be our great High Priest and sympathize with our sufferings! Ask God to help you walk with Jesus through the gloom of Passion Week.



MAIN IDEA

Jesus faces betrayal, scorn, and suffering for the sake of our souls.

Today's reading covers a series of dark events in the life of Jesus, from the Garden of Gethsemane, to His betrayal, arrest, and trial. Keith Getty and Stuart Townend have written the following lyrics describing the gloom of Gethsemane:

To see the King of heaven fall
In anguish to His knees,
The Light and Hope of all the world
Now overwhelmed with grief.
What nameless horrors must He see,
To cry out in the garden:
Oh, take this cup away from Me
Yet not My will but Yours,
Yet not My will but Yours.

What was it that compelled the King of Glory to stoop so low, to face the betrayal of His friends, the scorn of His enemies, and the wrath of His Father upon the cross? Getty and Townend tell us in the final verse:

What took Him to this wretched place,
What kept Him on this road?
His love for Adam's cursed race,
For every broken soul.
No sin too slight to overlook,
No crime too great to carry,
All mingled in this poisoned cup,
And yet He drank it all,
The Saviour drank it all,
The Saviour drank it all.⁹

- What kind of things does Jesus experience in this chapter of Scripture? How does John describe these events?

- Where can you find hope in such a dark passage of Scripture? How can this passage, which is primarily a sorrowful one, help you to experience the joy of the resurrection?

PRAY

Thank God for His Suffering Servant. Thank Him that He was betrayed and scorned for us. Thank Him that He took upon Himself the wrath of God so that we wouldn't have to! Thank Him that He was willing to drink the cup of God's wrath down to the very dregs.



MAIN IDEA

Jesus is delivered up to be crucified.

In C. J. Mahaney’s book *Living the Cross Centered Life*, he asks a very important question about today’s passage: “With whom do you most identify in the events of this dark day? Of the many onlooking and participants in these scenes, whose actions are most like your own, if somehow you were also there?” He also supplies his personal answer to this question: “I identify most with the angry mob screaming, ‘Crucify Him!’”¹⁰ Mahaney is getting at a very important point with this question and answer: It is for our sin that Jesus went to the cross; He was crucified in order that our sin might be forgiven! This is a glorious truth, but it is also a heavy truth. The glory of it is that the eternal Son of God, God in the flesh, has taken our sin upon Himself and nailed it to the cross, where it no longer hangs over our heads or condemns us to hell. The weight of this truth is that you and I were complicit in the crucifixion of the Lord of Glory; our face was in the crowd, yelling “crucify Him!” and mocking Him as the “King of the Jews.” This second, weighty truth should humble us and lead us to worship Jesus all the more. Take some time to meditate on the following hymn lyrics from Horatius Bonar:

‘Twas I that shed that sacred Blood,
I that nailed Him to the tree,
I crucified the Christ of God,
I joined the mockery.¹¹

- How does the crowd relate to Jesus? How does Jesus relate to the crowd?

- Who do you most identify with in this passage? How can the scene described in today’s passage lead you to humility before the Lord and worship of Him?

PRAY

Thank God for sending His only beloved Son to die on a tree for you. Thank Jesus that He was willing to drink the cup of God’s wrath on your behalf. Thank Him that He was willing to be the ultimate fulfillment of God’s suffering servant, who was crushed for the transgressions of His people.

MAIN IDEA

Jesus Christ was crushed on the Cross for our transgressions.

Psalm 22 is one of the clearest Messianic passages in all of Scripture. Many of its verses point us to the physical pain and interpersonal humiliation that Jesus endured on the cross:

I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;
my strength is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.
For dogs encompass me;
a company of evildoers encircles me;
they have pierced my hands and feet—
I can count all my bones—
they stare and gloat over me;
they divide my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots (Psalm 22:14-18).

Psalm 22 also reveals the infinitely greater spiritual agony that Jesus experienced on the cross: “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Psalm 22:1). The most glorious, and the gloomiest, reality of the cross is that Jesus Christ faced the full, fierce wrath of God that we deserved. On the cross He experienced His Father’s wrath for the first and only time in all of eternity, and He did so for us! Cry out to Him in broken, humble thanksgiving today.

- What is the relationship between Psalm 22 and today’s passage? How does the crucifixion of Jesus fulfill the prophecy of Psalm 22?

- In what ways do you plan to express your thankfulness to Jesus today? Plan at least three ways.

PRAY

Thank your Lord Jesus Christ once again for drinking the cup of God’s wrath on your behalf. Pray and ask God to help you feel both the horror and the glory of the cross today. Ask Him to help you live in a manner worthy of the gospel!



MAIN IDEA

Jesus dies on the cross and declares, "It is finished."

Over the past week we have walked with Jesus down the Calvary Road—the path has been dark and full of pain and sorrow. At the same time, the path has been glorious as we have seen our Lord carry the burden of our sin upon His shoulders so that we wouldn't have to. In today's passage John describes the death and burial of Jesus. As Jesus dies He gives us one of the most remarkable and comforting phrases in all of Scripture: "It is finished" (John 19:30). Surely in one sense this could be taken to mean that His life on earth, His earthly ministry, is finished. But considering the whole counsel of God in Scripture, we know that this phrase refers to a grand, cosmic reality. For on the cross Jesus bore our sin and absorbed the infinite punishment for our sin that we truly deserved. No longer must we, like our Old Testament forefathers, make continual sacrifices for sin. Jesus has taken care of our sin once for all; He has done it; it is finished! We end today's passage with Jesus in the grave. We have walked with Him in the darkness of Calvary, now we must prepare our hearts to walk with Him in the light of the resurrection. The gloom of Passion Week will soon give way to the glory of our risen King! May your joy be full and may your worship be fervent, as you celebrate your risen Lord this Sunday. He is risen, He is risen indeed!

- What prophecies does John indicate are fulfilled in today's reading? Look in the footnotes of your Bible to see the Scripture references, and then go back and read the prophecies of Scripture that John refers to.

- How can meditating on the death and burial of Jesus help you prepare your heart for resurrection Sunday? What are some specific ways you can express your thankfulness for and devotion to the Lord on this special Sunday?

PRAY

Thank the Lord Jesus Christ for dying on a tree for you. Thank Him that He declared, "It is finished," and that your sins are no more! Ask that He would lead you to live in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

As you reflect on your personal study throughout the week, choose one verse or passage that particularly stood out to you.

- Why was this verse or passage so meaningful to you?

- In what areas of your life do these truths apply?

- In what ways do you plan to put the truths you've observed this week into practice?

Family Focus: Take the verse or passage that stood out to you and think about how you can share it with your family. How does it apply to your husband, wife, son, or daughter? For singles or students, think about how it applies to your friends or parents. Commit to share this passage with a family member or friend today.

Tomorrow our lesson is **Assurance of the Resurrection** from John 20:3-9; I Corinthians 15:20-28. Review these verses to prepare your heart and pray for your teacher.

WEEK OF
APRIL 2, 2018

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." *Luke 22:19*

MONDAY
APRIL
2

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

MAIN IDEA

Paul teaches the Corinthians how to display God's design for marriage in their own culture.

Perhaps you have seen the popular British television show *Downton Abbey*. Set in the post-Edwardian era, the show features the aristocratic Crawley family, who live in a classic English country estate fully staffed with domestic servants. Many of the affluent characters on the show are obsessed with fashion; they judge the character of others by the clothes on their back, and they determine their own fashion choices very carefully. Perhaps as you read today's passage you get a *Downton Abbey* feel. Why does Paul care so much about how a wife wears her hair when she prays, or if a husband's hair is long? The heart of this passage, though, is not so much the various outfits of marriage but God's design for marriage. Marriage, at the very core, is meant to be a picture of Christ's relationship with the church. In this picture, the husband represents Christ, who faithfully leads and loves the church. The wife represents the church, who faithfully submits to the authority of her Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:22-33). So why all the talk of covered and uncovered heads? In the Corinthian culture, a woman covered her head as a symbol of her marriage, and she uncovered it as a symbol of her singleness—much like a wedding ring symbolizes marriage in our culture. Men in the Corinthian culture would cover their heads during pagan rituals, so for a man to cover his head was a sign of biblical unfaithfulness. So Paul's appeal in this passage has less to do with the various fashions than in the spiritual realities that they signify. May we, in our culture, strive to live, dress, eat, drink, work, and exist in a way that brings ultimate glory to our Lord Jesus Christ!

- What relationship exists between this passage of Scripture and others that teach on marriage, such as Genesis 2:18-24 or Ephesians 5:22-33?

- What are some specific ways that you can use the cultural conventions of our day to bring glory to Jesus Christ?

PRAY

Thank God for marriage—thank Him for His perfect design of marriage and the way it so clearly points to the ultimate Bridegroom, our Lord Jesus Christ. Ask God to help you live faithfully in your time and place; ask Him to help you bring Him glory today.



MAIN IDEA

Jesus commands us to pay special attention to the Lord’s Supper.

The Lord’s Supper is something that is worthy of our special attention for the simple fact that Jesus commanded us to pay special attention to it: “And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me’” (Luke 22:19). Therefore, we will take the remainder of this week to focus on the Lord’s Supper. The Corinthians are chided by Paul because of their divisive behavior when they assemble for the Lord’s Supper. Our goal is to realize the sacredness and solemnity of the Lord’s Supper as an ordinance commanded by our Lord. We must fight against the Lord’s Supper becoming just a routine. Paul has major warnings for those who partake of the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner. We want to partake in a manner that honors our Lord Jesus Christ. As we dive into these verses, the key question we want to answer is this: How do we as a church gather together at the Lord’s Table in a worthy manner? Paul gives us three specific actions to take to partake of the Lord’s Supper in a worthy manner. Over the next three days, we will examine each.

- What is the context of Paul’s teaching on the Lord’s Supper? How were the Corinthians partaking of it?

- In the past, how have you viewed the Lord’s Supper? How might this passage sharpen your understanding of it?

PRAY

Thank God for the Lord’s Supper. Thank Him that He instituted an ordinance for us to remember the broken body and shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and to celebrate our union with Christ in His body and blood. Ask God that He would help you to focus on honoring Him in the Lord’s Supper.

MAIN IDEA

We can honor Jesus at the Lord's Table by *remembering* His death.

The first action that Paul gives to us to partake of the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner is to remember the Lord's death (1 Corinthians 11:23-25). He quotes Jesus, "Do this in remembrance of Me" (1 Corinthians 11:25). The Lord's Supper is a memorial service, but a very particular kind of one. In a normal memorial service, we honor and preserve the memory of someone who has died and succumbed to the grave. In the Lord's Supper, we honor One who has conquered the grave; we memorialize the death of One who is very much alive! We eat the bread to remember that His body was broken for us, and we drink the cup to remember that His blood was poured out for us. And as we do these things, we set our hope on a risen Lord who purchased our forgiveness through His very own death. May we, as a church body, come to the Lord's Table in a worthy manner by *remembering* His death!

- What is the significance of the cup and the bread during the Lord's Supper?

- The next time you partake of the Lord's Supper, how do you plan to remember His death?

PRAY

Thank God for the death of His Son Jesus. Thank Him that through the blood of Christ He has established a new covenant for the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:28). Ask Him that He would help you to remember the death of Jesus the next time you approach the Lord's Table.



MAIN IDEA

We can honor Jesus at the Lord’s table by *proclaiming* His death.

The second action we must take to honor Jesus in the Lord’s Supper is this: proclaim the Lord’s death. Paul says that in the Lord’s Supper we “proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26). The Lord’s Supper is a proclamation of the gospel without words. It is not primarily a private event, but a public one. When we gather together for the Lord’s Supper, everyone watching sees the gospel on display as we eat the bread and drink the cup. And for you personally, it is an opportunity for you to *proclaim* that you are continuing to trust in Christ alone for your salvation; as you eat the bread, you *proclaim* that His body was broken for you, and as you drink the cup, that His blood was poured out for you. This is also a means of mutual encouragement: As you partake in the Lord’s Supper alongside your fellow church members, you get to watch as they too receive Jesus as their only comfort in life and death. So may we be faithful to honor Jesus by *proclaiming* His death during the Lord’s Supper!

- How specifically should we proclaim the Lord’s death during the Lord’s Supper?

- What does your thought process usually look like during the Lord’s Supper? How might understanding the purpose of the Lord’s Supper change the way that you think about it the next time you partake in it?

PRAY

Thank God for sending His Son Jesus to die for us. Thank Him that He made the great news known to you at some point in your life, and that He graciously gave you the gift of faith to trust in Jesus for your eternal salvation. Ask Him to help you proclaim the good news of Jesus during the Lord’s Supper and in all of life.



MAIN IDEA

We can honor Jesus at the Lord’s table by *examining* ourselves.

The last action we must take to honor Jesus in the Lord’s Supper is to *examine* ourselves in light of His death. Paul says that we must examine ourselves because if we don’t, we risk being guilty of dishonoring our Lord: “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 11:27). To avoid dishonoring Jesus, a person must “examine himself...and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup” (1 Corinthians 11:28). How, then, should we examine ourselves? Paul teaches us that at least one way is by “discerning the body” (1 Corinthians 11:29). We should examine ourselves by thinking about the broken body and the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ; we should think about His death. We should think about how it was our sin that sent Jesus to the cross. Martin Luther once said that “We all carry about in our pockets His very nails.”¹² During the Lord’s Supper, we should hear the nails that pierced His hands jingle about in our pockets and feel their sharp points prick our legs; we should be acutely aware of the gravity of our own sin. And at the same time, we should move beyond the darkness of our own sin into the light of a sinless Lord, who did not remain in the grave but came forth in glorious day. The Lord’s Supper, then, while it should be marked with gravity and solemnity, should also have great overtones of celebration and joy, as we memorialize our risen King who bled and died so that we might live.

- Why is it so important for Paul that we examine ourselves at the Lord’s Table?

- Have you ever practiced self-examination at the Lord’s Table? How do you plan to do so the next time you partake of the Lord’s Supper?

PRAY

Thank God for the great sacrifice of His only beloved Son. Thank Him that He sent Jesus to die on the cross specifically for *your* sin. Confess your sin to God, confess that it was your sin that nailed Jesus to the cross. Praise Him for His glorious grace that He lavished upon you by saving you from an eternity separated from Him.

As you reflect on your personal study throughout the week, choose one verse or passage that particularly stood out to you.

- Why was this verse or passage so meaningful to you?

- In what areas of your life do these truths apply?

- In what ways do you plan to put the truths you've observed this week into practice?

Family Focus: Take the verse or passage that stood out to you and think about how you can share it with your family. How does it apply to your husband, wife, son, or daughter? For singles or students, think about how it applies to your friends or parents. Commit to share this passage with a family member or friend today.

Tomorrow our lesson is **Remembering the Sacrifice** from 1 Corinthians 11:17-29. Review these verses to prepare your heart and pray for your teacher.

WEEK OF
APRIL 9, 2018

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.
1 Corinthians 12:27

MONDAY
APRIL
9

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

MAIN IDEA

The first sign of true spiritual gifting is an increased ability to glorify Jesus Christ.

As we have read through 1 Corinthians, you have probably been a bit surprised to find out just how dysfunctional the church in Corinth was. We have seen divisions over favorite preachers; crass sexual immorality; and brothers and sisters in Christ suing one another, leading one another into temptation, and competing with one another socially at the Lord's Table. Ironically, the Corinthians also regarded themselves as being profoundly spiritually gifted! Specifically, they placed much emphasis on their display of the more sensational gifts, such as speaking in tongues. In Paul's teaching on the spiritual gifts in today's passage, he outlines two signs of spiritual gifts that truly come from the Holy Spirit. The first sign that Paul mentions is that true spiritual gifts explicitly honor and glorify Jesus Christ. They do not say, "Jesus is accursed!" but rather "Jesus is Lord" (1 Corinthians 12:3). In the divine hierarchy of the Holy Trinity, the Spirit's role is to glorify the Son (John 16:14). Therefore, the main result of the gifting of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life is that the believer brings glory to the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Based on what you have learned about the Corinthians so far in Paul's first epistle to them, why would they have latched on to this idea of spiritual gifts? Based on what you know about the sins they struggled with, how might they have misunderstood or misapplied the spiritual gifts?

- To the best of your knowledge, how has God gifted you? In what ways are you most adept in bringing glory to Jesus Christ?

PRAY

Pray with Luther and thank God that "the Spirit and the gifts are ours, through Him who with us sideth."¹³ Ask God to help you know how He has gifted you, and ask Him to help you use your gifting for the glory of His Son Jesus Christ.



MAIN IDEA

The second sign of a true spiritual gifting is an increased ability to serve the church.

Yesterday we saw how the first sign of a true spiritual gift is that it explicitly honors and glorifies Jesus Christ. Today we look to the second sign: a true spiritual gift serves the church. Paul says, “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7). Although there are a variety of gifts that God may grant to His people, they each serve for the common good of the one body, just as God, in His Triune nature as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is One. Since each gift within the church is empowered by the same Spirit, the same Lord, the same God, we know that each gift will serve the same ultimate purpose: the glory of God and the good of His people. As you take some time to ponder and sort out how God has gifted you, use the two categories Paul gives us as filters: If your perceived gift does not glorify Jesus Christ or if it does not work toward the common good of the body of Christ, then you can know that this is not a Spirit-empowered gift. But if you can truly say that your gift honors Jesus and builds up His church, then praise Him and use your gift with every ounce of energy and strength that God gives you!

- How does Paul use the three persons of the Trinity in this passage to help us understand spiritual gifts?

- In what specific ways has God gifted you to serve His church? Take some time to brainstorm, and write out any ways you think of. Plan to use your gift to serve the church this Sunday.

PRAY

Thank God for placing you in a church—thank Him for the preaching and the music and the fellowship and Sunday School. But also thank God that He has uniquely gifted you to serve your church. If you aren’t currently doing so, ask God to lead you into a position of service. Ask Him for guidance and humility to serve in whatever way He has gifted you.

MAIN IDEA

The church finds unity in Christ.

As we have observed, the Corinthian church was a divided church. Quarrels and lawsuits were common among them, and they just didn't seem to be able to get along. It is against this backdrop of division that Paul describes the unity of the church of Christ: "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13). While there is certainly diversity of nationality, language, skin color, and culture within the church, there is no diversity of worth. As Paul tells us in Galatians, "In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith" (Galatians 3:26). In God's eyes, we are all equally His sons. One day, you will stand before the throne of God and worship Him face to face with a multitude from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation (Revelation 5:9). That multitude will be diverse in every imaginable way, except for one: each individual in that multitude will be an adopted son of the Most High God, bought with the precious price of the blood of Christ. The church finds unity not in demographic commonalities, but in the Christ who redeemed her.

- How does Paul describe the unity of the church? What is the unifying factor within the church?

- How can today's passage drive you toward encouraging and celebrating diversity within your church? How can today's passage drive you toward encouraging and celebrating unity within your church?

PRAY

Thank God for sending His Son Jesus Christ to die for His church. Thank Him that He purchased a people for His own possession. Thank Him that this church is made up of people from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. Ask God that He would help you to be unified with your brothers and sisters in Christ from other ethnic groups and cultural backgrounds.

MAIN IDEA

The church functions like a body: it has many members that all function toward the ultimate purpose of God’s glory and our good.

Many people don’t know that C. S. Lewis, the author of the popular children’s book series *The Chronicles of Narnia*, also wrote a trilogy of science-fiction space novels. The third installment of this trilogy is titled *That Hideous Strength*. In it, the protagonist Mark finds himself in the presence of the head of a malicious, supernatural organization called the N.I.C.E. The most shocking part of this encounter for Mark, though, is that the head of this organization is a literal head! No body, just a head. The narrative that accompanies this encounter is dripping with descriptions of the unnatural and unhuman nature of the talking head.¹⁴ Part of being human is living with a body that has many different moving parts that all work together toward a singular goal: the life and health of the body as a whole. When we come to 1 Corinthians 12, we find Paul using this aspect of our human bodies as an illustration for how spiritual gifts should function in the church. Just as God has arranged the different members of our bodies to work together toward the common goal of life and health, so also God has arranged the different members of His church to work together toward the common goals of His glory and the good of His people (1 Corinthians 12:18). God has uniquely gifted each member of the church to serve toward this greater purpose. May each of us function within the church the way that God has created us to function, and may we do so for His glory and for the good of His church.

- How does Paul use the idea of the human body to illustrate the way the church functions?

- How might Paul’s illustration of the body help you to be a more faithful church member? How do you plan to contribute toward the good of the church this week?

PRAY

Thank God for placing you in a church body, where you have a divinely appointed function and purpose. Thank God that the body He has placed you in is the body of Christ, so that you enjoy unity not only with your Lord but also with His people. Ask that He would help you to bring glory to His name as you serve His church.



MAIN IDEA

In the church, the life of each member directly affects the life of the body as a whole.

Perhaps you remember the story of Korah’s rebellion from Numbers 16. Korah and several other men from the congregation of Israel rose up and rebelled against God’s servant Moses. They refused to turn back from their rebellion, and so God opened up the mouth of the earth and swallowed them up with 250 others. On the next day, God sent a plague into the congregation of Israel and over 14,000 died. This passage is a great example of how the sin of one man can affect the health of the entire congregation. Korah’s sin disseminated like a poisonous gas into the congregation of Israel, killing many more than were directly complicit in his original sin of rebellion. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul emphasizes the mutually dependent relationship that exists between the various members of the church: “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together” (1 Corinthians 12:26). In an individualistic age, this is a vitally important message to remember. Each action that we take, each thought we think, and each word we speak will have ramifications that stretch out beyond us into our entire church body. Your sister in Christ’s trial is not just hers; it is yours too. Your brother in Christ’s success is not just his; it is yours too! We are a body of many members, and the life and spiritual state of each member affects the body as a whole. May we remember this and meditate upon this as we prepare our hearts for Sunday worship.

- What is the connection between the story of Korah’s rebellion and Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 12?

- How might it change the way you live, act, speak, and think if you keep in mind the fact that the way you live your life has a direct effect on the life of your church?

PRAY

Thank God for the unity of the body of Christ. Thank Him that He has given you brothers and sisters in Christ with whom you can weep and rejoice, celebrate and mourn, and live and die. Ask God that He would help you to suffer with those who suffer and rejoice with those who are honored in your congregation.

As you reflect on your personal study throughout the week, choose one verse or passage that particularly stood out to you.

- Why was this verse or passage so meaningful to you?

- In what areas of your life do these truths apply?

- In what ways do you plan to put the truths you've observed this week into practice?

Family Focus: Take the verse or passage that stood out to you and think about how you can share it with your family. How does it apply to your husband, wife, son, or daughter? For singles or students, think about how it applies to your friends or parents. Commit to share this passage with a family member or friend today.

Tomorrow our lesson is **Serving God's People** from 1 Corinthians 12:4-12, 21-26. Review these verses to prepare your heart and pray for your teacher.

WEEK OF
APRIL 16, 2018

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

Let all that you do be done in love.

1 Corinthians 16:14

MONDAY
APRIL
16

1 Corinthians 12:30b – 13:13

MAIN IDEA

Love is the central and supreme Christian virtue.

The Corinthian church was plagued with many issues which we have discussed in the previous weeks. But all these issues can be boiled down into one central issue: love. The Corinthians had a love problem. All their various divisions over their favorite pastors, their lawsuits against one another, their quarrels over food sacrificed to idols, their crass sexual immorality, their ungodly conduct at the Lord's Table, and their oneness concerning spiritual gifts all have one single remedy: the love of Christ poured into the heart of the believer through the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). This is why Paul tells them in 1 Corinthians 12:30b that he will show them "a still more excellent way." The virtue of love, in the Christian life, is superior over all other Christian virtues. A silver tongue, a scholar's mind, and a lion's heart are all nothing without love; love is superior to any string of words, body of knowledge, or act of faith. Love is so central and supreme in the life of the Christian, John tells us, because it is at the heart of who God is and what God has done for us through His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 4:7-12). May we follow our Lord Jesus faithfully by obeying the new commandment He gave to us: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another" (John 13:34).

- How does Paul describe love in relation to other Christian virtues?

- Are you a loving person? In what ways can you improve in the virtue of love? How might 1 Corinthians 13 be helpful for you in this?

PRAY

Thank God for loving us so much that He sent His only beloved Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. Ask God to help you imitate Jesus by loving those around you as He has loved you.



MAIN IDEA

Jesus Christ is the supreme example and fulfillment of the virtue of love.

When one thinks of Shakespeare and love, one immediately thinks of *Romeo and Juliet*. However, Shakespeare’s character Orsino in his comedy *Twelfth Night* was just as much a worshiper of love as the famous star-crossed lovers. Here is how Orsino contemplates love:

O spirit of love, how quick and fresh art thou,
That, notwithstanding thy capacity,
Receiveth as the sea. Nought enters there,
Of what validity and pitch so-er,
But falls into abatement and low price
Even in a minute.¹⁵

Orsino compares love to the sea: it is wide, vast, and open, yet also harsh and treacherous. Such a description, of course, is very fitting in terms of how our modern culture defines and experiences love. The New Testament, however, and especially 1 Corinthians 13, defines love in radically different terms:

- Love is patient and kind—it bears up under intense suffering and goes out of its way to sacrificially serve.
- Love does not envy or boast—it does not desire what it does not have; it is not tainted and stiffened with pride.
- Love is not arrogant or rude—it is marked by humility and leaves impressions of joy and sweetness on its recipient.
- Love does not insist on its own way—it cares more for others than itself.
- Love is not irritable or resentful—it does not flare up in anger or hold grudges; it forgives and forbears.
- Love does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.
- Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things—love never ends!

May we display in our lives the kind of love that Paul describes. May we do so not only because God has commanded it, but because we desire to imitate our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the supreme example and fulfillment of love.

- How does Paul define love?

- When you think of love in your life, is it the kind that Paul describes? How can 1 Corinthians 13 help you to love others as Christ has loved you?

PRAY

Thank God once again for the love of Christ. Ask Him to have Christ’s love compel you to love those around you.

MAIN IDEA

Paul applies love to the issue of spiritual gifts.

The structure of 1 Corinthians 12–14 is very interesting. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul instructs the Corinthians on the nature of the church and spiritual gifts, in response to their misuse of the spiritual gifts. First Corinthians 13 is, of course, Paul’s soaring crescendo on the nature of Christ-like love. Then, in 1 Corinthians 14, he returns to teaching on the nature of the church and the spiritual gifts. So, the question must be raised: What’s love got to do with it? How does love resolve the issue the Corinthians were having with using spiritual gifts for one-upmanship? Paul answers these questions in 1 Corinthians 14:1 when he tells the Corinthians to “pursue love” in relation to the spiritual gifts. Instead of using the spiritual gifts to serve self, he instructs them to use their spiritual gifts for the building up of the church (1 Corinthians 14:3, 4, 5, 12, 17, 26). When it comes to the issue of spiritual gifts, love is the great force which turns the Corinthians away from self and toward others. May we experience this power in our own hearts and in our church! May we use the gifts that the Lord has given us, not for our own fame or glory, but for the building up of the church God has placed us in and called us to serve.

- What is the connection between love and spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12–14?

- How does Paul’s teaching on love change the way that you view and use your spiritual gifts?

PRAY

Thank God for the great love for which He loved you, that in love He predestined you for adoption as a son. Ask God to help you be compelled by the love of Christ to serve and build up your church.

MAIN IDEA

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is the basis of the Christian's hope and confidence both in this life and in the life to come.

Many in the Corinthian world, much like in our modern world, believed that life is completely extinguished after death. While the atheistic worldviews of our culture appear more sophisticated, boasting disciplines such as evolutionary biology or astrophysics, the practical outworking of each culture is the same: If there is no life after death, if there is no resurrection from the dead, we may as well “eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (1 Corinthians 15:32). Yet as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ we have a radically different view of both life and death. The fact is, our Lord died and was buried in a grave, but then was raised again from the grave on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:3). Not only do we believe this truth with all our heart, but it is the basis of our eternal hope. Because Christ was raised, we believe that though “in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at His coming those who belong to Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:22-23). As followers of Christ who trust in the resurrection power of our Lord, we have confidence that our greatest enemy has been defeated:

Death is swallowed up in victory.

O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:54b-56).

While this confidence is eternal and future-oriented, it is also imminent and practical. We can be steadfast, immovable, and always about the work of the Lord because we know that our work for Him is not in vain—just as we will be raised and go on in His presence throughout eternity, so also will the effects of our works in His name.

- What is the connection between the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection of the saints?

- What should the practical effect of the resurrection of Christ be in your life? How does this truth change the way that you live your life?

PRAY

Praise God for raising the Lord Jesus Christ from the grave. Thank Him that He has given you the same hope of resurrection. Ask that He would help you to be steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord.



FRIDAY
APRIL
20

1 Corinthians 16

MAIN IDEA

The requisite characteristic of a true man is love.

When you think of a man, a real man's man, what do you think of? Perhaps a survivor comes to your mind, like Bear Grylls toughing it out in the Arctic tundra or the Sahara Desert for weeks on end. Maybe you think of physical strength as the requisite characteristic for manliness, and so images of Arnold Schwarzenegger pumping iron pop into your head. Or is manhood for you defined by a fighter's spirit, as exemplified in characters like Rocky Balboa or William Wallace? In terms of our culture, these are all very traditional depictions of true manhood; as we move further and further away from Judeo-Christian ethics, the image of manhood continues to change. Yet in 1 Corinthians 16, we find a definition of manhood that dramatically challenges the traditions and trajectory of our society. Paul says, "Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love" (1 Corinthians 16:13-14). Did you catch that? Paul comes to Corinth and defines manhood and strength like this: Let all that you do be done in love. For Paul, love is the requisite characteristic of manhood. Why? Because he does not derive his standard of manhood from the Greek Pantheon, GQ magazine, or the Hollywood Actors' Guild; rather, he derives it from the character of Jesus Christ, the fullest, strongest, and truest man who ever walked the earth. Jesus Christ is the ultimate example and fulfillment of love, and we are called to imitate Him in this love. May we put to practice Paul's instruction in Ephesians 5: "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 5:1-2). May we seek the attributes of love found in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 that were the basis of Christ's love for us.

- How does Paul define manhood in 1 Corinthians 16?

- If you are a man, how does this passage change the way that you view yourself? How does it change the way that you carry yourself? If you are a woman, how does it change the way you relate to men?

PRAY

Praise God for His Son Jesus Christ, the fullest, strongest, and truest man who ever walked the earth. Men, ask God to help you imitate Jesus's manhood by walking in love. Women, pray for the men in your life—husbands, fathers, sons, brothers, friends—and ask God that He would help them to be true men as Paul describes them in 1 Corinthians 16.

SATURDAY
APRIL
21

As you reflect on your personal study throughout the week, choose one verse or passage that particularly stood out to you.

- Why was this verse or passage so meaningful to you?

- In what areas of your life do these truths apply?

- In what ways do you plan to put the truths you've observed this week into practice?

Family Focus: Take the verse or passage that stood out to you and think about how you can share it with your family. How does it apply to your husband, wife, son, or daughter? For singles or students, think about how it applies to your friends or parents. Commit to share this passage with a family member or friend today.

Tomorrow our lesson is **Understanding Love** from 1 Corinthians 13:1-13. Review these verses to prepare your heart and pray for your teacher.



UNDERSTANDING LOVE

SUNDAY SCHOOL GROUP NOTES _____

Lined area for taking notes, consisting of 20 horizontal lines.

List 2-3 ways you plan to respond to the truths you have learned this week:

Lined area for writing responses, consisting of 6 horizontal lines.

WEEK OF
APRIL 23, 2018

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us.
2 Corinthians 1:20

MONDAY
APRIL
23

2 Corinthians 1:1-7

MAIN IDEA

God is the Father of mercy, the God of comfort.

The Heidelberg Catechism is widely known by church historians as one of the most important summaries of doctrine borne out of the Protestant Reformation. One can easily see why when one reads the first question:

Q: What is your only comfort in life and in death?

A: That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death, to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.¹⁶

The Heidelberg Catechism draws this language of comfort from 2 Corinthians 1. Paul points us to our only comfort in life and in death: “the Father of mercies and God of comfort, who comforts us in our affliction” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4), and His Son Jesus Christ, through whom “we share abundantly in comfort too” (2 Corinthians 1:5). Brother or sister, if you are experiencing affliction in your life right now, you must know, believe, and trust that you have a Father of Mercy, a God of comfort, who will comfort you through your Lord Jesus Christ. His ways of comfort are many: like a Good Physician He applies the right salve for your wounds, like a Good Father He knows just what you need, and like a Good Shepherd He lays you down in green pastures and leads you beside still waters. Cling to Him today, trust in Him, hope in Him!

- How does Paul describe the comfort that God gives us?

- What is the most common view of “comfort” in our society? How does it differ from the kind of comfort described here? How can you experience this comfort more in your life?

PRAY

Thank God for who He is: a Father of mercy and God of comfort. Ask that you would experience this comfort day by day, in both the good times and the times of affliction. Ask that He would help you to lead others into His comfort.



MAIN IDEA

During affliction, we must rely on God, who raises the dead.

John Bunyan was one of the most afflicted Christians of his era. Consider this testimony from a particularly tumultuous time in his life, when he was imprisoned for twelve years for preaching the gospel:

Parting with my Wife and poor children hath often been to me in this place as the pulling of the Flesh from my bones; and that not only because I am somewhat too fond of these great Mercies, but also because I should have often brought to my mind the many hardships, miseries and wants that my poor Family was like to meet with should I be taken from them, especially my poor blind child, who lay nearer my heart than all I had besides; O the thoughts of the hardship I thought my Blind one might go under, would break my heart to pieces.¹⁷

Yet amid the darkness of Bunyan’s suffering, the light of God’s Word shone brightly:

I never had in all my life so great an inlet into the Word of God as now in prison. Those scriptures that I saw nothing in before were made in this place and state to shine upon me. Jesus Christ also was never more real and apparent than now. Here I have seen him and felt him indeed... I have had sweet sights of the forgiveness of my sins in this place, and of my being with Jesus in another world... I have seen [such things] here that I am persuaded I shall never, while in this world, be able to express... Bless you, prison, for having been in my life!¹⁸

In this passage, Bunyan is preaching the same message as Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:8-11: God sovereignly ordains our afflictions for His glory and our good, so that we would depend exclusively on the sustaining grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. May we heed this word today and cling to our precious Lord!

- How does Paul speak about affliction in this passage?

- Have you faced affliction lately? How might today’s passage change the way you approach affliction in the future?

PRAY

Praise God for sending His Son Jesus to be a Man of Sorrows, acquainted with grief. Thank Him that He has not left us to experience the devastating effects of a sin-stricken world on our own, but that He gives us His only beloved Son as a great high priest. Ask Him that He would help you rely on Him exclusively during your next time of affliction.

MAIN IDEA

Paul boasts in the Lord by pointing to God’s grace as the basis for his behavior among the Corinthians.

In what do most people boast? In the workplace, employees boast when they meet and exceed their production goals or complete their job function better or more efficiently than others. In sports, players boast about beating the opposing team or player. At home, perhaps the husband boasts about being the breadwinner or one of the children about being the “favorite.” At church, a preacher may boast in his abilities to deliver a message or a church member in her faithful attendance. Boasting is everywhere and in general it is liked nowhere! As Christians, though, there is a sense in which we should boast louder and more fervently than any other people in the world. Does that sound counterintuitive? Consider what Paul teaches should be the sole object of our boasting: “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:31). In Corinth, boasting was part and parcel of the culture: the “sophists” were boasting in their exceptional rhetorical abilities with which they swayed the opinion of the masses and members of the Corinthian church were boasting in their spiritual gifts. But when Paul comes to Corinth, he spurns all such vain boasting and determines to boast only in the Lord. So, then, when Paul refers to his behavior among the Corinthians in today’s passage, it is no wonder that he ultimately attributes it not to earthly wisdom, but to the grace of God! May we, in all aspects of our lives, earnestly seek opportunities to boast in the Lord and the great grace with which He has loved us!

- What is the object of Paul’s boasting in this passage?

- Are you a boasting person? What are the usual objects of your boasting? How can today’s passage help you to boast in the Lord rather than yourself?

PRAY

Praise God for being a praiseworthy God. Adore Him for being of infinite and eternal worth. Ask that He would help you to represent His worth in the way that you speak. Ask Him to give you opportunities to boast in Him today.

MAIN IDEA

In Christ, all of God’s promises are fulfilled.

In today’s passage Paul shares his plans to visit the Corinthians. As he shares his commitment to remain faithful to his promise to visit them, he makes one of the most remarkable statements about the faithfulness of God in all of Holy Scripture: “For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in Him it is always Yes. For all the promises of God find their Yes in Him. That is why it is through Him that we utter our Amen to God for His glory.” Did you know that every promise God makes to His people is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ? This is what Paul is saying right here. When we trust in Jesus Christ, we trust in the One in whom all of God’s promises are ultimately fulfilled. Turn the pages of your Bible and read of the promises that God made to His people; these promises are yours in Christ Jesus, because Christ Jesus has ultimately fulfilled them. What an incredibly faithful God we serve. He is so faithful that He was willing to send His only Son Jesus Christ into this world to die a sinner’s death so that His promises to us would prove true. Thank Him today! Worship Him today!

- What is the connection in this passage between God’s faithfulness to His people and Paul’s faithfulness to the church in Corinth?

- Do you believe that God is faithful? Do you trust in Him as your faithful Lord? How might today’s passage help you to trust in His faithfulness?

PRAY

Thank God for being faithful, steadfast, and trustworthy. Thank Him for proving His faithfulness to us by sending His Son Jesus to be the ultimate fulfillment of all His promises. Ask Him that He would help you reflect His character by being faithful in your own life.



MAIN IDEA

Just as God has forgiven us our trespasses in Christ, so also we should forgive others.

Today’s passage wrestles with one of the most important aspects of our Christian lives: forgiveness. Even in the church of Jesus Christ, Paul observes in this passage, there are those who cause sorrow in the hearts of others. While we cling to the eternal hope of the new heaven and new earth, in which “there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain” (Revelation 21:4), we as the church desperately need to know how to deal with sorrow-makers in our fallen world. While Paul affirms that their sorrow-making should result in “the punishment...inflicted by the majority” (2 Corinthians 2:6), he ultimately charges the Corinthians to respond to sorrow-makers with forgiveness. The trademark of the regenerated heart is forgiveness. Jesus said as much when He told us to pray, “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” and by stating thereafter, “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:12, 14). In today’s passage, then, Paul challenges the Corinthians just as he challenged the Ephesians: “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:31-32). God has forgiven us for infinite offenses, an eternal debt that no amount of punishment could ever pay off, save that of Jesus Christ; how could we not, then, respond to others in a like manner of forgiveness?

- What are the characteristics of the forgiveness that Paul describes in this passage?

- Are you a forgiving person, or do you tend to hold grudges? How might today’s passage help you to be a more forgiving person? How can the message of the gospel impact your ability to forgive?

PRAY

Praise God for forgiveness—that in Christ He forgave you an infinite and eternal debt incurred by sin. Ask that He would help you to forgive the finite and temporal transgressions that others commit against you.

SATURDAY
APRIL
28

As you reflect on your personal study throughout the week, choose one verse or passage that particularly stood out to you.

- Why was this verse or passage so meaningful to you?

- In what areas of your life do these truths apply?

- In what ways do you plan to put the truths you've observed this week into practice?

Family Focus: Take the verse or passage that stood out to you and think about how you can share it with your family. How does it apply to your husband, wife, son, or daughter? For singles or students, think about how it applies to your friends or parents. Commit to share this passage with a family member or friend today.

Tomorrow our lesson is **Enjoying God's Comfort** from 2 Corinthians 1:3-14. Review these verses to prepare your heart and pray for your teacher.

WEEK OF
APRIL 30, 2018

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.
2 Corinthians 5:9

MONDAY
APRIL
30

2 Corinthians 2:14 – 3:6

MAIN IDEA

As ministers of the gospel, we preach a message that carries the aroma of life for some and death for others.

Ministers of the gospel are some of the most loved and hated people in society. Why the ambivalence toward pastors? We could tell story after story of ministers who fell into financial disrepute or sexual immorality, scourging the name of Christ; yet, there is an even more fundamental reason why ministers of the gospel, whether pastors or laymen, are both loved and hated. Paul shows us this reason by using an illustration from Roman military life: after a great victory in battle, the Roman army would conduct a triumphal procession through the city, made up of both the victors and the prisoners of war. For the victors, the sounds of the applauding crowds and the aroma of the streets were the sweet spoils of victory; yet for the prisoners, these same cheering crowds sounded like a band of jeering murderers, and the aromas of the streets smelled like the stench of death. See the contrast? For the victorious group, the procession meant life and joy; for the defeated group, it meant death and sorrow. Something similar occurs when we preach the good news of the gospel faithfully: “We are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life” (2 Corinthians 2:15).

- How does Paul describe his calling as a minister of the gospel?

- How might this passage provide encouragement to those who are persecuted or rejected due to their faithful proclamation of the gospel?

PRAY

Thank God for giving us the glorious news of the gospel. Thank Him for giving us the centerpiece of the gospel, His Son Jesus Christ. Ask that He would help you to be a faithful minister of His gospel; ask for courage to proclaim a message that means life to some and death to others.



MAIN IDEA

Under the new covenant, we have been freed to worship the Lord.

If you have conversations about the Bible with people in the secular world, you have undoubtedly heard the classic Old Testament/New Testament dichotomy. The Old Testament, some say, is all about death, wrath, and God's anger; the New Testament, alternatively, is all about life, peace, and God's love. This dichotomy is, of course, a false dichotomy. When we come to 2 Corinthians 3:7-18, we find one of the most candid and careful expressions of the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament in all of Scripture. First, Paul is candid: The Old Testament law did not lead to life, but to death. We know, though, from other verses of Scripture, that the reason the law led to death was not the law, but the sinfulness of man that exploited the law for its own purposes (cf. Romans 7:7-23). Next, Paul is careful: It is not that the Old Testament law was bad or evil, but rather temporary and insufficient. Moses, put a veil over his face after seeing the glory of God; likewise, God could not dwell within the camp of Israel without a veil separating Him from the people. While the old covenant, since its inception, was always in the process of ending, the new covenant is eternal. While the bondage of the veil cast its shadow over old covenant members, those under the new covenant are freed, for the veil has been torn and unlike Moses they can see the light of the glory of the Lord with an unveiled face. You, brother or sister, are a member of this new covenant that was ratified by the blood of Jesus Christ. You, unlike the old covenant members who went before you, have unfettered access to God whenever you would like it. So, will you approach His throne of grace today and receive the mercy He so gladly lavishes upon you?

- How does Paul describe the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament?

- Today's reading contained some rather heavy theological truths; how do these truths impact your life? How, for instance, does understanding your identity as a member of the new covenant impact the way you relate to God and your neighbor?

PRAY

Thank God for the new covenant. Praise Him for sending Jesus to shed His blood for us. Go to His throne of grace today, ask for mercy, and experience the glory of unfettered access to your God and King.

MAIN IDEA

While the enemy veils some, God has graciously shown us the light of the gospel.

Light is one of the most important concepts in all of Scripture. The biblical authors portray God as the great light-giver, who said, "Let there be light, and there was light" (Genesis 1:3). The apostle John says that "God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5) and records Jesus revealing Himself as "the Light of the world" (John 8:12). In the same verse, Jesus goes on to say that "whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the Light of life" (John 8:12). In even more poetic, glorious terms, Jesus says in Matthew that "the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matthew 13:43). One of the key qualities of light is its innate ability to cast out darkness. God eliminates the darkness of un-creation by creating light, and Jesus expels the darkness of the sinful world by entering it as the Light of the world. Jesus also abolishes the deep darkness of our own hearts by giving us the Light of life. It is no wonder then that Paul turns to the categories of light and darkness when he considers the state of the world in which he lives. The enemy operates in darkness, and his *modus operandi* is to veil and cover the light of the gospel. God, though, "who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). By His grace we have seen the light of the gospel. May we, as "children of the light" (1 Thessalonians 5:5), bow down today and worship Him for it.

- What other passages in Scripture contain the concept of light? Grab a concordance (or use the one in the back of your Bible) and do a biblical word study on "light."

- How does the knowledge that the enemy is actively veiling the light of the gospel in the lives of the people around you change the way that you live? What kind of plan can you make today to shine the light of the gospel into the lives of unbelievers?

PRAY

Thank God for being a light-giver and for being light Himself. Thank God for sending Jesus into the world as the Light of the world and making you a child of light through His death, burial, and resurrection. Ask God to help you shine the light of the gospel into the lives of those around you.



MAIN IDEA

God has eternal purposes for our time in this world and for our afflictions.

In 1922, Helen H. Lemmel penned these words to this beautiful hymn:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.¹⁹

As a church, and as a society, we desperately need an eternal vision; we need the enticements of this world to grow strangely dim as we consider the glory and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is Paul’s emphasis in 1 Corinthians 4:7-18. This world and the afflictions that it brings are transient, lasting for only a moment in light of eternity. Yet this world and the afflictions that it brings are not unimportant or meaningless; rather, how we spend our time on this earth, and particularly the way that we respond to suffering, prepares us for eternity. God ordains our time on this earth, and our moments of affliction, for one ultimate purpose: “So that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 4:15). God intends to use our afflictions, persecutions, downfalls, and every other situation of life to spread the glorious gospel of His Son Jesus Christ and to make His name great among the nations.

- How does Paul talk about afflictions and suffering in this passage?

- How do you usually respond to bad things happening in your life? How might this passage give you a different perspective on suffering? How might it change the way you respond to affliction?

PRAY

Praise God for placing the glorious light of His Son Jesus Christ in the clay jar of your body. Thank Him for giving you such a glorious purpose on this earth: to spread that light throughout the nations. Ask that He would use every circumstance of your life toward that ultimate end.

MAIN IDEA

Whether in this life or the next, Christians make it their aim to please God in all things.

If you have ever been on a road trip with young children, you know that it is an almost universal rule that they must ask one question repeatedly, at intervals of roughly thirty minutes. That question is, of course, “Are we there yet?” While this question is common in our popular movies and literature about American life and childhood, it really does illustrate some important aspects of the human condition. Think about what goes into the making of this question: The child is traveling in the car, heading toward a desirable destination, and he or she wishes to have a timeline and an assurance of the arrival at that destination. Isn’t this what we seek in our lives? We are traveling through life, and Scripture teaches us that those in Christ are heading toward a very desirable destination—a destination upon which we set our hope. We want to get there and we want to get there soon! We also want to be sure that we really are going to get there, that we are heading in the right direction. First Corinthians 5:1-10 speaks into our future hope of glory in at least two significant ways:

1. This passage helps us gain assurance that we are headed toward an eternity with Christ. Paul says that this eternity is the very thing that God has prepared us for and that He has given us the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of that future eternity. Can you point to evidence of the indwelling Holy Spirit? Do you display the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-24)? If so, you have a guarantee of your eternal hope in Christ!
 2. This passage helps us to live now in light of our eternal future. Paul says, “So whether we are at home (in eternity) or away (in our mortal bodies), we make it our aim to please Him” (2 Corinthians 5:9). This is a life-changing truth: the life of eternity need not be delayed until death strikes (or Jesus returns) and we are ushered into our eternal rest. Because you have been purchased by the blood of Christ, and because the Holy Spirit dwells within you, you can begin living eternity today by making it your aim to please God in all things. Your eternal future will be a future of worshiping and pleasing the God of your salvation—why not start now?
- How does Paul talk about eternity in this passage? How should we think about it? How should we prepare for it?

- Do you make it your aim in life to please God? What are some practical things that you can do today to begin making it your aim to please God?

PRAY

Thank God for the eternal hope that you have on the basis of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thank God for the assurance of that eternal hope that you can experience through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Ask that God would help you to make it your aim to please Him.

SATURDAY
MAY
5

As you reflect on your personal study throughout the week, choose one verse or passage that particularly stood out to you.

- Why was this verse or passage so meaningful to you?

- In what areas of your life do these truths apply?

- In what ways do you plan to put the truths you've observed this week into practice?

Family Focus: Take the verse or passage that stood out to you and think about how you can share it with your family. How does it apply to your husband, wife, son, or daughter? For singles or students, think about how it applies to your friends or parents. Commit to share this passage with a family member or friend today.

Tomorrow our lesson is **Displaying the Gospel** from 2 Corinthians 4:5-18. Review these verses to prepare your heart and pray for your teacher.

WEEK OF
MAY 7, 2018

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

2 Corinthians 5:21

MONDAY
MAY
7

2 Corinthians 5:11-15

MAIN IDEA

Our foremost motive in serving God should be God Himself.

When attempting to discern whether an action is right or wrong, one of the most important things to consider is the motive. C. S. Lewis illustrates this point well: “A man occupying the corner seat in the train because he got there first, and a man who slipped into it while my back was turned and removed my bag, are both equally inconvenient. But I blame the second man and do not blame the first.”²⁰ The only difference between these two men is, of course, motive: the first lacked malicious intent, while the second displayed it. When it comes to our service in the kingdom of God, our motives are of utmost importance. In 2 Corinthians 5:11-15, Paul uses his own life and ministry as an example of right motives in service to God. The central motive driving all of Paul’s ministry is God: “the fear of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:11), “God” (2 Corinthians 5:13), and “the love of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:14). Moreover, Paul teaches that this motive should be at the center of everyone’s life: Christ “died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Corinthians 5:15). What is driving your life today? May we join Paul in allowing our ministries, our lives, our thoughts, and our desires to be shaped by the will of our awesome, loving, and merciful God.

- Based on the context of 2 Corinthians, why might Paul have felt it important to speak to his motives for doing ministry among the Corinthians?

- If you were to be honest, what are your true motives for serving the Lord? Do you perhaps find that your motives are hard to discern or are mixed? How might this passage help you in discerning and directing your motives in serving God?

PRAY

Thank God for being a fearful, yet loving God. Pray you would live wisely in the fear of the Lord, and that your actions would be shaped by the love of Christ. Pray that God would lead you into His service with a right heart and right motives.

MAIN IDEA

We who are in Christ are new creations and ambassadors for Christ.

Anthropology is a very popular field these days. It comes from two Greek words—“*anthropos*” and “*logos*”—and literally means “the study of man.” While much of the work from this field today centers on humanistic or Darwinian views of man, it does pose the question: What is the biblical perspective of the nature of man? The Bible says many things in this regard: man is created in God’s image, man is fallen, man is a creature, man has an eternal soul and a finite body, etc. In 2 Corinthians 5:16–6:2, though, Paul gives a striking description of the new man, the person who has entered an eternal saving relationship with God. First, we who are saved are a “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). As Paul says in Ephesians, we have been “created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:24). Such righteousness and holiness does not come from within us, but from our being “in Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:17), through whom God reconciled the world and gave us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18). This leads to the second anthropological statement that Paul makes in this passage: We who are saved are “ambassadors for Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:20). What an amazing, humbling office God has given us. We are His representatives, His spokespeople here on this earth, whose job it is to appeal on behalf of God for lost sinners to be reconciled to Him through His Son Jesus Christ. Are you living as a new creation today? Are you living as an ambassador for Christ today? May we go today into our various spheres of influence and proclaim with Paul boldly and unapologetically, “Behold, now is the favorable time, behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2).

- What does Paul mean when he says that we are ambassadors for Christ?

- How does knowing that through Christ you are a new creation in Christ and an ambassador for Christ help you to live for Him on a day-by-day basis?

PRAY

Thank God today for sending His Son Jesus Christ, who knew no sin, to become sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. Thank Him for exchanging your filthy rags of sin for His perfect, spotless righteousness. Ask Him to help you be His ambassador, and to help you make His great name and the gospel known in all the places you go.

MAIN IDEA

A fruitful ministry is determined by faithfulness, not worldly success.

What does a fruitful ministry look like? For many in the popular Christian culture, a fruitful ministry is basically a reflection of a successful secular corporation, yet within the sacred space. The key metrics are the spread of popularity, the increase in attendees, and the multiplication of funds. While none of these metrics are inherently bad, and in fact they can be very good, Paul's description of a fruitful ministry in today's passage differs significantly from our culture's perspective. Paul's ministry was marked by affliction, hardship, calamity, beatings, imprisonment, rioting, harsh labor, sleepless nights, and hunger (2 Corinthians 6:4-5). We can take a look at the book of Acts to see the numerous events and circumstances from which these descriptions derive. Yet Paul's ministry was also marked by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the activity of the Holy Spirit, love, truthful speech, and the power of God (2 Corinthians 6:6-7). This juxtaposition between suffering and sanctity is at the core of Paul's ministry: he is sorrowful in his circumstances, yet always rejoicing because of the power of God at work in his life through the gospel (2 Corinthians 6:10). As we read this passage, we should consider two things: 1) Our measure for a fruitful ministry should look more like the one Paul uses in this passage, rather than the one our popular culture uses; 2) the same should be true of our personal lives! Success in your life, from God's perspective, is not determined by your flow of income or performance output, but rather by faithfulness to your Lord Jesus Christ even amid life's most difficult circumstances. What a liberating message!

- How does Paul describe his ministry in this passage?

- What are some ways that this passage can inform the way you think about success in your own life?

PRAY

Thank God today for His powerful Word that speaks into every area of our lives. Ask God that your life would be driven by a desire to be faithful to Him, rather than by ambitious or self-serving desires.

MAIN IDEA

God prohibits us from worshiping idols for His glory and for our good.

“You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image” (Exodus 20:3-4). Have you ever thought about why God places such an emphasis on idolatry? Why is it so important that He uses the first two commandments of the Ten Commandments explicitly (and the third and fourth implicitly) to prohibit it? There are at least two answers to this question which give us a well-rounded, biblical picture of the prohibitions from idolatry. Both answers appear in today’s passage. While 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 begins with a discussion about not being unequally yoked in marriage and other partnerships, Paul bases this prohibition on the greater prohibition against idolatry. His reasoning for prohibiting idolatry is two-fold: 1) We should not worship idols because we were created to glorify God alone as His image bearers, and as Paul says, “We are the temple of the living God” (2 Corinthians 6:16). God constructed our bodies for the sole purpose of worshiping Him in all things, in all times, and in all circumstances. Our lives should be a “living sacrifice, holy and acceptable” to Him (Romans 12:1). Many people get hung up on this first reason: They ask, “Why did God create a world in which everything is about Him, His glory, His worship? Isn’t that very selfish?” First, God is a being of infinite worth, and therefore is the only being worthy of all praise, glory, and honor. But Paul’s second reason for prohibiting idolatry also provides a response to this question: 2) We shouldn’t worship idols because our greatest good and joy is found in worshipping and glorifying God alone. In verses 16 through 18 Paul quotes from several Old Testament passages to show the Corinthians the wonderful covenant relationship God offers to those who worship Him in Christ. He will be their God, and they will be His people; they will be His children, and He will be their Father. He will welcome them with open arms into fellowship with Him. There is no greater joy available to us than fellowship with God: As the psalmist says, “In Your presence there is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11). So, may we abstain from worshiping idols of the heart today, for the glory of God and for the good of our souls!

- How does Paul address the issue of marriage between believers and unbelievers in this passage? On what principles does he base his teaching?

- How might today’s reading encourage you to cast out idols in your heart and in your life? What specifically about Paul’s teaching is challenging or encouraging to you?

PRAY

Pray to God and praise Him for being infinitely worthy. Pledge all your praise, glory, and honor to Him today. Ask Him to help you purge idols from your heart and your life.

MAIN IDEA

Discipline is an expression of love; and by God's grace, its ultimate result is joy.

One of the most difficult aspects of parenting is discipline. The principle behind discipline is this: short term grief produces long-term joy and reward. When our children are disobedient, they must feel the negative consequences of their sin, so that they will walk on the joyous path of obedience for future decades to come. We must all feel the weight of our sin to bask in the glory of God's forgiveness. Paul's relationship with the Corinthians was very much like this parent-child relationship. First Corinthians constitutes Paul's stern discipline of the Corinthians for their dire disobedience. Though this discipline resulted in a season of grieving for both Paul and the Corinthians, the long-term result was the Corinthians' repentance. Moreover, the repentance of the Corinthians ultimately led to joy, to such an extent that Paul could actually write 2 Corinthians and boast of the joy and comfort that he has in them because of the testimony of their faith. Fellow Christian, do not begrudge the discipline of the Lord; fellow brother or sister, do not spurn the discipline of your church; fellow son or daughter, do not despise the discipline of your parents. Discipline is an expression of love, and by God's grace its ultimate result is joy. Ponder the words of the author of Hebrews as you wrap up your devotion today:

My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by Him. For the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives (Hebrews 12:5-6).

- How does Paul describe his relationship with the church at Corinth in this passage? What affect did his disciplinary actions have on the Corinthians and their relationship with Paul?

- Have you experienced the discipline of the Lord? How have you thought about such discipline? How might today's passage help you to receive it with joy?

PRAY

Praise God that He is holy, righteous, and good. Thank Him that He does not merely wink at sin, but rather hates it and pours out His wrath upon it. Also praise Him for His love, grace, and mercy. Thank Him that He did not leave you to perish in your sin, but instead sent Jesus to die for your sins and save you from His wrath. Praise Him for all His glorious attributes and how they unite so perfectly at the cross of Jesus Christ.

SATURDAY
MAY
12

As you reflect on your personal study throughout the week, choose one verse or passage that particularly stood out to you.

- Why was this verse or passage so meaningful to you?

- In what areas of your life do these truths apply?

- In what ways do you plan to put the truths you've observed this week into practice?

Family Focus: Take the verse or passage that stood out to you and think about how you can share it with your family. How does it apply to your husband, wife, son, or daughter? For singles or students, think about how it applies to your friends or parents. Commit to share this passage with a family member or friend today.

Tomorrow our lesson is **Becoming New** from 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; 6:1-2. Review these verses to prepare your heart and pray for your teacher.

WEEK OF
MAY 14, 2018

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!
2 Corinthians 9:15

MONDAY
MAY
14

2 Corinthians 8:1-12

MAIN IDEA

The heart of giving is the grace of God given to us.

Over the next week, we will focus on a series of texts in 2 Corinthians about giving. Today we will focus on the reason for giving. What, according to God, is the heart of giving? Paul answers this question for us in today's passage. Notice that Paul doesn't begin this passage with the giving of the Corinthians, but rather with God's giving: "We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia" (2 Corinthians 8:1). The Macedonians did not give out of the goodness of their own hearts or because of some ulterior motive; rather, they gave out of the power of the grace of God that had been given to them. We read more about this grace of God in 2 Corinthians 8:9: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich." Here is the heart of giving: Since Christ gave freely and sacrificially of Himself for our good, so we should give freely and sacrificially of ourselves for the sake of the glory of God and the good of others. In this way, giving is an opportunity for each of us to worship our God and display Christlikeness. May we abound in this kind of giving!

- What is the heart of giving? How does Paul describe giving in this passage?

- Do you struggle with giving? How might this passage help you to give freely, joyfully, and sacrificially?

PRAY

Thank God for giving you the gift of salvation through faith in Christ. Thank Him for making Himself poor, that you might become rich in Him. Ask Him that you would be freed from the love of money and self, and that you would give sacrificially for the sake of His glory and the good of others.

MAIN IDEA

God has so designed His church that each member abundantly benefits from the support and care of the other members.

In previous weeks we looked at Paul’s description of the church—the church is one body with many members (1 Corinthians 12:12). As such, each of the many members works together in unity for the overall good of the one body (1 Corinthians 12:24-26). If one member suffers, the others suffer with it; if one member rejoices, the others rejoice with it; if one member is in need, the others meet that need. This is the principle behind Paul’s teaching in 2 Corinthians 8:13-15. You can imagine why it might be necessary for Paul to address the concept of fairness in his teaching on sacrificial giving. Surely some in the Corinthian church asked, “Why must we give sacrificially so that others can live in abundance?” Yet Paul responds to these anticipated questions by showing the Corinthians how the church of Jesus Christ works: When one member is burdened, the others give sacrificially to relieve that burden, so that in future times this same previously burdened member can give sacrificially to support another burdened member. In God’s eternal wisdom, He so ordered His church so that no member of it should ever remain in need, but rather each should have his or her needs met abundantly by the other members of the church. Be encouraged, brother or sister, by the wonderfully merciful care that God gives to you through His church.

- What are the responsibilities and benefits of giving that Paul lays out in this passage?

- What is your relationship like with the church? How might today’s passage be an encouragement for you to be an active participant of your local church?

PRAY

Praise God today for His manifold wisdom that He makes known to all through the church. Ask that He would help you and give you opportunities to actively participate in His church. Particularly, ask that He would give you opportunities to give within the church.

MAIN IDEA

The way we use money gives us insight into our relationship with God.

The Bible speaks a lot about money. If you were to read through the New Testament paying close attention to the number of verses that address the issue of money, you would be surprised how many you find. But why does Scripture place such an emphasis on this worldly object, money? Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:24: “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” Your relationship with money speaks volumes about your relationship with God. If you are a servant of money, then you are not a servant of God. If you are a servant of God, then you use money to serve the greater purposes of God’s kingdom. This is precisely the emphasis that Paul carries throughout today’s passage: The reason why Paul and the other brothers are travelling around, preaching the gospel and collecting money for the church in Jerusalem, is “for the glory of the Lord Himself and to show [their] good will” (2 Corinthians 8:19). The aim of their ministry is not financial growth but honor in the sight of both God and man. They want to use the donations that the churches gave for the glory of God and the good of His church. We live in a culture in which most people bow down to the almighty dollar. May we bow down to the Lord Jesus Christ and Him alone, and may we use our money and other resources in such a way that all glory and honor goes to Him!

- How does Paul speak about money in this passage? What are his motivations for collecting it among the churches?

- What is your relationship like with money? How might today’s passage encourage you to change the way you relate to money?

PRAY

Bow down and worship God today. Praise Him for being infinitely worthy. Confess any hold that your heart has on the things of this world, especially money. Ask that He would free you from the snare of the love of money by freeing you to love Him supremely!

THURSDAY
MAY
17

2 Corinthians 9:1-5

MAIN IDEA

The heart of Christian giving is the grace of God revealed in the person and work of Christ.

For many, tax season is one of the most unpleasant times of the year. We all know it is coming, and most of us can anticipate with fair accuracy what our next tax bill will look like. Yet year after year, we never feel quite ready to fork out the funds we owe our government. In fact, our government has experienced such reluctance concerning the payment of taxes that it invented a tax extension form, meant specifically for people who aren't ready to file their taxes by the standard deadline. In today's passage, Paul takes great pains to teach us that the heart of Christian giving should be the exact opposite of the reluctance described above. We should give a gift as "a willing gift, not as an exaction" (2 Corinthians 9:5). We should not give with a feeling of reluctance, but rather of readiness! The fruit of Christian giving is produced by the root of God's grace. It appears in our lives when we realize just how gracious God was to us by sending His only Son, Jesus Christ, to come to earth and give over His own life so that we could be saved from our sin. The world has never seen a more generous gift than this. May we respond to this unfathomable gift by giving in like manner, for the glory of God and the good of His church!

- According to Paul in today's passage, in what manner should a Christian give?

- In normal circumstances, what are your motivations for giving? How might today's passage cause you to strive toward different motives in giving?

PRAY

Praise God today for the greatest gift of all eternity: His only beloved Son. Thank Him that He forgave your infinite debt by the blood of Christ. Ask that He would allow you to show a similar generosity and kindness in your own giving!

MAIN IDEA

The heart of giving is thankfulness for the inexpressible gift of the gospel.

More than likely, you have heard many sermons on 2 Corinthians 9:6-15. This is a familiar passage to us because this passage, perhaps more than any other, gets to the heart of giving. God desires us to give not due to compulsion or out of the soil of reluctance, but rather with a cheerful heart. Cheerful giving, Paul says, is fruitful giving. And the reason why it is fruitful giving is because it is God-glorifying, God-honoring, God-thanking, and God-praising giving. Cheerful giving is the natural response of a redeemed heart to God's inexpressible gift of salvation. As the grace of God enters our lives and begins to change us day by day, it frees us to love God supremely and to forsake our love for the world. We stop thinking about how we can use our money to serve ourselves or gain more power, and we begin thinking about how we can use it to glorify God, serve His church, and reach the lost. This is the heart of giving that God creates in us when we experience His salvation. As you head into the weekend and prepare your heart for Sunday morning, spend some time meditating on the inexpressible gift of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As you do so, pray that God would help you to express your thankfulness toward Him by giving cheerfully this Sunday.

- What are the biblical purposes and motivations for giving according to this passage?

- Are you a cheerful giver? Do you place your gift in the plate reluctantly or willingly? What role does your salvation play in your attitude toward giving? How might today's passage change the way that you give?

PRAY

Praise God for the inexpressible gift of His Son Jesus Christ. Praise God for the free gift of salvation through Christ Jesus our Lord. Ask that He would help you to express your thankfulness to Him this Sunday by helping you to give cheerfully.

SATURDAY
MAY
19

As you reflect on your personal study throughout the week, choose one verse or passage that particularly stood out to you.

- Why was this verse or passage so meaningful to you?

- In what areas of your life do these truths apply?

- In what ways do you plan to put the truths you've observed this week into practice?

Family Focus: Take the verse or passage that stood out to you and think about how you can share it with your family. How does it apply to your husband, wife, son, or daughter? For singles or students, think about how it applies to your friends or parents. Commit to share this passage with a family member or friend today.

Tomorrow our lesson is **Giving Faithfully** from 2 Corinthians 9:1-15. Review these verses to prepare your heart and pray for your teacher.

WEEK OF
MAY 21, 2018

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

2 Corinthians 13:14

MONDAY
MAY
21

2 Corinthians 10

MAIN IDEA

The Christian life is war, not against flesh, but against the spiritual strongholds and intellectual arguments of the world.

In warfare, one of the keys to winning the battle is understanding the battlefield. Where will the battle be fought? What kind of weapons will the enemy be using? What kind of weapons will render the enemy vulnerable? In 2 Corinthians 10, Paul uses this imagery of warfare to describe the Christian life: "For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:3-4). The war the Christian wages is not fought upon the front of the fleshly world, but rather in the spiritual realm. The Christian's weapons do not consist of physical, worldly devices but rather the spiritual means of grace, such as prayer, Scripture reading, Scripture meditation, Scripture memorization, participation in corporate worship, giving, fellowship, etc. These are the weapons that the Christian uses to destroy the strongholds, arguments, and lofty opinions raised against the knowledge of God (2 Corinthians 10:5). For in the means of grace we find the well-spring of the wisdom, power, and grace of God revealed and delivered to us perfectly in the person and work of Jesus Christ. And it is with this wisdom, this power, and this grace that we can take captive every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). Brothers and sisters, may we be good soldiers for the Lord today by taking up the weapons He has given us and waging the war He has called us to wage against sin!

- How does Paul employ the imagery of warfare in this passage? What is he saying about the Christian life?

- What sins do you struggle with? How might Paul's focus on the battleground of Christian warfare help you to change your battle plan against your sin?

PRAY

Thank God today for preparing you for the battle against the world and sin that He has called you to wage. Thank Him particularly for Jesus Christ, who is the ultimate victor over sin, death, and Satan. Ask that He would help you take up the weapons He has given you to fight the battle day-by-day.

MAIN IDEA

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.

When you think of God, what comes into your mind? When you think of the gospel, what is the content of your thoughts? A.W. Tozer began his classic work *The Knowledge of the Holy* with this striking statement: “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”²¹ The way that we think about God necessarily influences the way that we relate to God; if our thoughts about God are wrong, then when we worship we are not really worshipping God at all but rather a creation of our own minds! For this reason, in today’s passage Paul expresses his fear that the thoughts of the Corinthians would be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ (2 Corinthians 11:3). Paul’s goal is to present the church to Christ as a pure virgin, but if the church’s thoughts about God are led astray, they will find themselves in the arms of another lover, a false god, one born in the shadows of their own minds. May our minds be molded and shaped, not by our culture or by our sinful hearts, but by the power of God’s Word applied to our hearts and minds by the Holy Spirit!

- What emphasis or importance does Paul place on the thought life of the Christian?

- How might today’s passage influence the way that you think about your thought life? How can you do a better job taking your thoughts captive to obey Christ?

PRAY

Praise God for being the creator and sustainer of the universe. Thank Him for being righteous, just, good, loving, merciful, and gracious. Adore Him in His triune nature, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thank the Father for sending the Son to die for your sins, and thank the Son for sending the Spirit to indwell you and to convict you concerning sin and righteousness and judgment. Ask God that He would help you to think rightly about Him.

MAIN IDEA

God's grace is sufficient for us in every season of life.

Toward the end of World War II, after Winston Churchill had shown years of lion-like resolve and bravery in the face of an evil and formidable enemy, the British electorate ousted both his conservative party and him from office. His wife Clementine responded optimistically to this turn of events and said to him, "It may well be a blessing in disguise." Churchill responded, "At the moment it seems quite effectively disguised."²² Do you ever feel this way? Does an event ever occur in your life that completely confuses you? You ask, "God, why are You doing this? Why is this thing happening to me?" Paul experienced this. He faced "weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities" (2 Corinthians 12:10). And for our eternal benefit, God actually told Paul why he experienced his famous "thorn in the flesh": "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). God sometimes allows us to reach a point of desperation so that we can remember and understand that there is no power in us. God alone is omnipotent, and so therefore His grace is sufficient for us. What are you going through right now? What life event has you on your knees in prayer, asking God to stop the pain, the hardship, the calamity? Brothers and sisters, you can know this: God's grace is sufficient for you. You may remain in the trial for one day, for one year, or for ten years. But no matter the term of the calamitous season, God's promise to you remains rock solid: His grace is sufficient, the power of Christ will rest upon you amid your trial. Take heart, brothers and sisters, for we have a God to whom we can turn with all our needs, all our anxieties, and all our weakness.

- How does Paul think about and describe his trials?

- How do you typically get through a trial? What is your thought process amid a life crisis? How might today's passage help you to gain a new perspective on the trials you go through?

PRAY

Praise God for being the omnipotent, sovereign ruler over all the world. Thank Him for giving you the sustaining grace you need to persevere through any circumstance of life. Ask that He would help you to take to heart the perspective on trials that this passage teaches.

MAIN IDEA

The gospel minister's call is a call to service and sacrifice for the sake of souls.

In today's passage, Paul once again uses the imagery of the parent/child relationship to describe his relationship with the Corinthians. If you are a parent, you certainly understand this relationship. Especially in the early years of parenting, the relationship between you and your children seems very unilateral. You change their diapers, you feed them, you pick them up, you rock them to sleep, you wake up in the middle of the night to comfort them, you provide for their needs, you protect them, and you keep them alive. But the funny thing about it is this: You do all those things gladly, as if they are the greatest privilege in all the world, because, of course, they are! If you are a parent, you can most likely say to your children just what Paul says to the Corinthians: "I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls" (2 Corinthians 12:15). Paul's point here is that in his role as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ, he is willing to sacrifice all his pride, all his comfort, and all his self-preservation to serve the Corinthians and care for their souls. This is the lofty calling to which your pastors in the church have been called. They have not been called to a life of glamour, comfort, or ease; rather, they have been called to a glorious life of sacrificial service for the sake of your soul. Pray for them today!

- How does Paul describe his relationship with the Corinthians?

- How do you typically relate to and think about your pastors? How might today's passage alter your relationships with your pastors and the way that you think and pray about them?

PRAY

Praise God today for being your Shepherd, the One who leads you into everlasting life. Thank God also for the under-shepherds He has placed over you—your pastors. Pray for them today—ask that God would bless their ministries, ask that He would help them to care for your soul and the souls of the other members of the church.

MAIN IDEA

With his final remarks, Paul calls the Corinthians to love and unity in the church.

In December of 2017, R. C. Sproul, surrounded by his beloved family, breathed his last breath on this earth and went home to be with the Lord. Just days before he was hospitalized for the respiratory issues that would take his life, he preached his final sermon, titled “So Great Salvation.”²³ With some of the final public words of his life, R. C. lifted the banner of the salvation in Christ for his congregation to celebrate. If you could choose your final words, what would they be? In 2 Corinthians 13, Paul speaks some final words to the Corinthians. His main emphasis in these concluding remarks is the unity of the church. If you remember when we began to study Corinthians, we found that the major issue in the Corinthian church was a lack of love for one another, resulting in disunity, strife, and a host of other sins. So, with his final words Paul points the Corinthians to the God of love and peace, who will be with them. As we conclude our study of Corinthians, Paul’s call of peace, love, and unity to the Corinthians remains as relevant to us today as it did to the Corinthians then. We desperately need the love and peace of our Lord to reign in our lives, and we desperately need to show this same love and peace to one another. May we love one another today, just as God in Christ loves us.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all (2 Corinthians 13:14).

- What does Paul include in his final remarks? What is the tone of these remarks?

- What are your relationships like with your fellow members of the church? In what ways can you improve these relationships so as to live in unity with your brothers and sisters in Christ?

PRAY

Praise God today for His trinitarian nature, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Praise Him for the love and peace that you experience through the death, burial, and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ and the indwelling of His Holy Spirit. Ask God that you would experience today the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

SATURDAY
MAY
26

As you reflect on your personal study throughout the week, choose one verse or passage that particularly stood out to you.

- Why was this verse or passage so meaningful to you?

- In what areas of your life do these truths apply?

- In what ways do you plan to put the truths you've observed this week into practice?

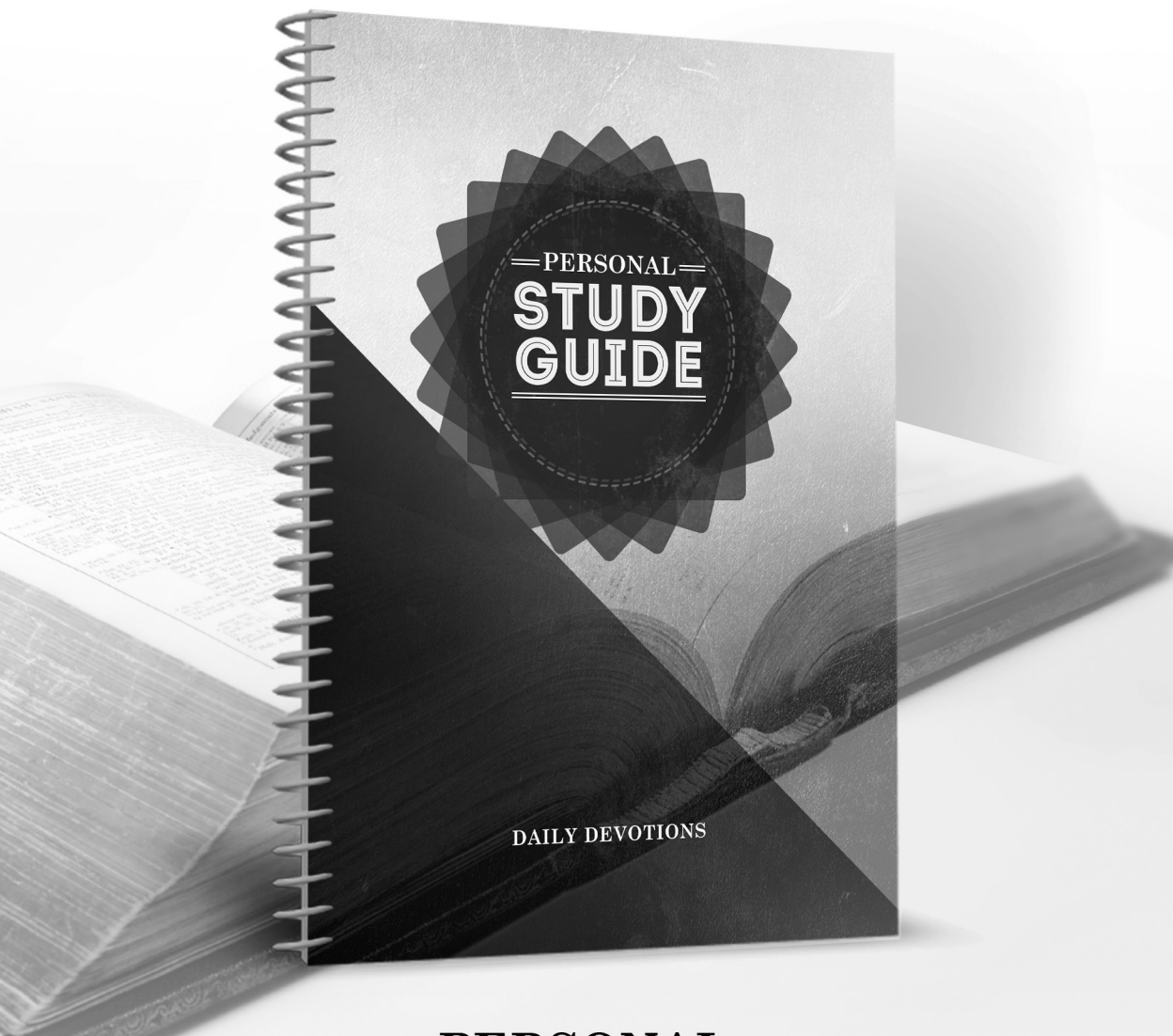
Family Focus: Take the verse or passage that stood out to you and think about how you can share it with your family. How does it apply to your husband, wife, son, or daughter? For singles or students, think about how it applies to your friends or parents. Commit to share this passage with a family member or friend today.

Tomorrow our lesson is **Finding Strength** from 2 Corinthians 12:7b-10; 13:2-8. Review these verses to prepare your heart and pray for your teacher.

CITATIONS

- 1. Page 3 - Introduction**
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- 2. Page 6 - Tuesday, February 27**
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- 4. Page 9 - Friday, March 2**
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- 6. Page 23 - Friday, March 16**
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- 9. Page 34 - Tuesday, March 27**
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- 10. Page 35 - Wednesday, March 28**
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- 12. Page 44 - Friday, April 6**
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- 13. Page 47 - Monday, April 9**
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- 16. Page 61 - Monday, April 23**
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- 17. Page 62 - Tuesday, April 24**
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- 18. Page 62 - Tuesday, April 24**
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- 19. Page 71 - Thursday, May 3**
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- 20. Page 75 - Monday, May 7**
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- 21. Page 90 - Tuesday, May 22**
Tozer, A.W. *The Knowledge of the Holy*. New York: HarperCollins, 1961. Page 1.
- 22. Page 91 - Wednesday, May 23**
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- 23. Page 93 - Friday, May 25**
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DAILY DEVOTIONS

**PERSONAL
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