

# Adult Teaching Resources

February 4, 2018



## Epiphany: Big Questions (January 7-February 11)

**1 Corinthians 9:16-27 – “Any Volunteers?”**

2 Corinthians 4:1-6 (RCL 4:3-6) – “Have You Seen the Light?”

## Lent: Keeping Faith (February 18-March 25)

Genesis 9:1-17 – “A Global Promise”

Genesis 17:1-22 (RCL 17:1-7, 15-16) – “A Covenant Family”

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# Any Volunteers?

## 1 Corinthians 9:16-27

### FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

### Bible Background

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*“If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!” 1 Corinthians 9:16*

As people of faith, we have an incredible message of love and hope to share with the world. The gospel message is timeless and speaks to all generations across the ages. Sharing that message would be an easy process if we could develop a one-size-fits-all sound bite for every ear to hear.

What we know to be true, though, is the world has many ears and a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work. For the message to be heard, the messenger needs to know the audience. An uninformed, inexperienced audience will hear the message differently than those who have lived and experienced the fullness of life. The messenger needs to understand others, their needs, and their pain points in order to effectively share the gospel.

Paul understood this truth and wrote so that we might know it, too.

### Opening

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Before class begins, think about how many participants might show up and how many groups of 3-4 in a group you will have. Once you have that number in your head, prepare a set of paper slips, by writing down a different group of people in your church or community. For example, if you think you will have four small groups, your slips of paper might include: children, youth, singles, adults with children, and senior adults. (Have one more slip available). You can create the slips by age groups or by professional status or by any means that will readily make sense to your class.

After your group arrives, tell everyone they will take a familiar Bible story or truth and prepare a way to share that story or truth to a familiar group within the church or community. Choose one of your favorite (familiar) passages for each group to use (the Prodigal Son, Daniel in the Lion's Den, the birth of Jesus, etc.) then have someone from each group pick from the slips of paper you prepared.

Tell each group they need to think about the group they have chosen and figure out the best way to share the story of truth to that group.

## Opening *continued*

Give each group some time to work through the exercise, then have each group share their “presentation.”

Talk about the similarity of the message but the different ways of sharing the message.

Why are so many different approaches necessary?

Is one presentation more effective, or important, than others? Why?

What challenges and opportunities does this present for the church?

## Reading the Bible

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What is the consequence for not proclaiming the gospel? (woe to me)

What is Paul’s reward? (he makes the gospel free of charge)

What does Paul do to himself to share the gospel? (he makes himself like those around him, he becomes like a Jew, he becomes like one outside the law, etc.)

How did Paul relate to different people he encountered? (he became like them, he became all things to all people) Why did he do this? (for the sake of the gospel, to share in its blessings)

What does Paul say about a race and the runners in the race? (all the runners compete, only one wins a prize, run to win)

How are we to run the race of the gospel? (exercise self-control, don’t run aimlessly, punish the body and enslave it)

## Making Connections

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How do you think ministers and those called to ministry-type positions should receive pay? Why do you say that? In your opinion, is there a better way?

What is the most effective way you have heard or experienced the sharing of the gospel? What made it so effective?

Paul says in verse 20, “To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews.” Have you ever tried to “become like” someone in order to share the gospel with them? Share your experience.

As people of faith, where do you draw the line on how far to go in order to “become like” someone else for the sake of the gospel message? Why is that line significant for you?

What does the phrase, “I have become all things to all people,” mean to you? How are you living this out? What do you need to live it out?

## Making Connections *continued*

Our Lesson Writer says, “Through stressing the importance of winning, Paul was not suggesting that only one winner would gain entrance to the kingdom. The race of faith is not a competition with others, but with ourselves.” How can we, the faithful, win the race? What do we need to do individually? What do we need to do corporately?

What discipline do you need in your life to be more effective in sharing the gospel? What steps are you willing to take to make it happen?

## So What? \_\_\_\_\_

Ask the groups from the beginning of class to gather back together. Have each group brainstorm different people or groups they/the church can try to reach with the gospel message. Then, have each group select one name from their list and spend time dreaming and scheming specific ways they can “become like” in order to get the message out.

Give each group time to create and then have each group share their ideas.

Spend time discussing and making plans to do the work that needs to be done.

## The Challenge \_\_\_\_\_

This week, do what your small group decided to do in order to reach someone else with the gospel message. Work with someone from your small group to “become like” and share Jesus with someone else.

## Prayer \_\_\_\_\_

*Loving God, you call us to a life of service and ministry. We want to tell others about you and share your love and grace. Help us to follow Paul’s ideas to become like others so we can build relationships centered in you. Give us the words to say and the courage to say them. Amen.*

## Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

**The Text**—The Revised Common Lectionary text for this Sunday is 1 Cor. 9:16-23, but Paul’s train of thought continues to v. 27, so we’ll include vv. 16-27 in our study, along with a brief review of vv. 1-15 so we can get the bigger context.

**Supporting ministers**—Paul’s decision that he would not accept financial support from the Corinthians led to some controversy. Why? We must keep in mind that Paul was a pioneer: there were no established models for how missionaries should live or find their support. The closest comparison was that of various rhetoricians or philosophers who earned their bread through giving lectures or tutoring students.

Richard B. Hays cites Ronald F. Hock in explaining various means by which they obtained support:

Four basic models were advocated, each with its distinctive drawbacks. The philosopher could charge fees for his teaching, as the Sophists did; they were often accused of greed and manipulating their pupils. Alternatively, the philosopher could be supported by a wealthy patron, as the “resident intellectual” in the patron’s household, often with the task of educating the family’s children; such a role entailed an obvious loss of independence, for the philosopher would be tied to the purse strings of the patron. A third option, notoriously practiced by the Cynics, was to beg on the streets; for obvious reasons this was widely perceived as eccentric and demeaning. The final option was for the philosopher to work at a trade in order to support himself; this had the disadvantages of low social status and of consuming time and energy for mundane matters. At least, however, working for a living preserved the philosopher’s independence from control by other people.

Paul decided early in his apostolic career to follow the fourth of these models, working with his own hands to earn his living (cf. 1 Thess. 2:5-10; 2 Thess. 3:7-9) – supplemented by occasional unsought gifts from some of his churches, particularly the church in Philippi (cf. Phil. 4:10-20; 2 Cor. 11:9b). This was a relatively unusual choice (the first two options were by far the most common), and the Corinthian correspondence shows that it proved controversial.

(Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011], 147; drawing from Ronald F. Hock, *The Social Context of Paul’s Ministry: Tentmaking and Apostleship* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980, 50-65].)

## Digging Deeper *continued*

**The law of Christ**—In v. 21, when Paul says “I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law,” he does not define what he means by “the law of Christ.” In other discussions, however, such as 1 Corinthians 13, it is evident that he equates the law of Christ with selfless love shown in Christ’s behalf. In Galatians 6:2, he wrote “Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

**It’s Greek to me**—Paul’s willingness to adapt to the culture in which he worked is a reminder that some churches find it very difficult to overcome outdated practices and communicate effectively with the changing culture that has emerged around them. *Do you ever feel that your church is speaking Hebrew in a world that understands only Greek?*

**Follow my example**—Verse 22 is a clear reminder that Paul’s extensive discussion of his rights as an apostle were intended to convince the “strong” believers in Corinth that they should follow his example of respecting the scruples of the weak: it was more important to encourage others’ faith than to demand one’s own rights.

**Making things practical**—Let’s consider the question of how we can best follow Paul’s advice by pondering the appropriateness of these sample cases.

(1) A man has a burden for an unbelieving co-worker, but his job allows little or no free time for conversation. He doesn’t usually patronize bars, but decides to join his friend at a local watering hole for his accustomed “happy hour” after work, orders a soft drink, and talks mainly about sports. There is no hard-sell of the gospel, but he is building a relationship. What do you think of his approach?

(2) A Minister of Youth wants to cultivate a talented young man who appears to be wasting his life in drugs and bad company, so he buys him lunch one day in hopes of sparking a friendship. The young man asks if his rock band can play a concert in the church fellowship hall, but the minister knows that the band plays music laced with violence, profanity, and abusive sexual imagery. He knows he can’t grant permission for that kind of concert, but asks to sit in on their next practice session. What do you think of that strategy?

(3) A church’s outreach committee recognizes that the demographics of its neighborhood are shifting. It studies whether to recommend that the church begin a second, distinctly different worship service to appeal to newcomers, or to invest funds in hiring an ethnic pastor to lead outreach efforts to a growing language group. Would that be too threatening for your church?

## The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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### Does Paul contradict himself by “boasting”?

Paul’s insistence that he has refused to stand on his rights and claim benefits from the churches seems so self-effacing that it seems strange to read his statement in v. 16: “If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!”

It appears that Paul wants to have a reason for boasting, but his purpose is so counterintuitive to us that we could easily miss it. Paul’s boast is that he gave up rightful benefits so he could preach the gospel “at no charge,” as a gift to God. If he had taken payment for his tireless missionary efforts, he could not have offered his service to God so freely, and that was important to him (v. 18). Instead of receiving an offering from the churches he planted and served, he made his preaching an offering to God. In essence, Paul’s refusal to accept a reward for his work was a reward in itself, and of this Paul was rightfully proud.