

# Adult Teaching Resources

November 29, 2020



## The Right Stuff

Matthew 23:1-12—“The Right Stance”

Matthew 25:1-13—“The Right Preparation”

Matthew 25:14-30—“The Right Investment”

Psalms 100—“Good God!”

## Christmas Letters

**1 Corinthians 1:1-9—“Every Good Gift”**

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# “Every Good Gift”

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

## FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, 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.

### Key Verse

**1 Cor. 1:9**—“God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

### Opening

After everyone arrives for class, ask each person to find a partner. Then, ask each person to answer this question:

How have you grown in your faith and discipleship from what you would consider your “first day” of faith to right now?

Give everyone time to think through their answer and give each couple time to share with each other.

Open the floor for a larger group conversation, using these questions to guide the discussion.

What, if anything, about faith and discipleship has remained the same for you?

What, if anything, about faith and discipleship has changed for you?

How would you describe your faith life when you first started?

How would you describe your faith life today?

Are you where you want to be with your faith life? If not, what do you need/want to do to change it?

### Reading the Bible

How does Paul describe himself? (an apostle of Jesus by the will of God)

How did Paul describe the church of God that is in Corinth? (those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ)

Why does Paul give thanks to God for them? (because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus)

What does Paul attribute to them and their relationship with God? (they have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind)

## Reading the Bible *continued*

What has been strengthened among them? (the testimony of Christ)

What are they not lacking as they wait for the revealing of the Lord Jesus Christ? (any spiritual gift)

What will Jesus do for them? (he will strengthen them to the end)

What does Paul say about God? (God is faithful and by him they were called into the fellowship of his Son)

## Making Connections

What issues or topics have divided or fractured your church or churches you have been a part of? Where did those divergent viewpoints come from? How did that affect the church? How did that affect you?

Who is the best “peacemaker” from your life experience? What challenge did that person face? How did that person make peace? Did the peace last?

What does “apostle” mean to you? Is that a term you would use to describe someone today? Why or why not?

What does it mean to be “called by God?” Do you think you have been called? What is your calling?

Our Lesson Writer says, “Believers are to be set apart for holy living, but the Corinthians showed that church members can be perfectly forgiven but not perfect in behavior, saints and sinners concurrently.” Does this describe your church? How so?

What denominational or associational activities is your church involved in? What have you learned about the kingdom of God from those activities?

What ecumenical activities is your church involved in? What have you learned about the kingdom of God from those activities?

In explaining Paul’s thanksgiving to the church at Corinth, our Lesson Writer says, “Paul could praise what God had done for the Corinthians, but not what they had done for God.” What do you think Paul would say about your church?

What spiritual gifts do you see in the members of your class? What spiritual gift(s) do you think you have? How do you use those gifts?

What does it mean to you that “God is faithful?” How should our lives and witness reflect our understanding of that statement?

## So What?

Ask everyone to find their partner from the beginning of the lesson. Give each couple a piece of paper and a pen. Ask everyone to think about what Paul would write to your church or your Bible Study class.

- Would he have glowing praise?
- Would he be truly thankful for the work you are doing?
- Would he hand out backhanded compliments?
- Would he name what you need to do better?
- Would he offer words of encouragement?
- Would he provide solutions for correction?

Give each couple time to think and write their ideas about what a letter from Paul might look like for today.

After everyone has had time to write, ask for volunteers to share their letter ideas with the larger group.

Spend time discussing what you heard and what folks offered in their letters.

- What are we doing well?
- What can we improve upon?
- How are we living in the way of Jesus?

## The Challenge

This week, take one idea from the letters from Paul that you wrote and work on making improvements. What can you do to become more like what Jesus desires? What do you need to let go of to become more like what Jesus desires?

## Prayer

*Loving God, the letters from Paul give us great insight not only into the struggles and challenges of the early church, but also reveals our own struggles and challenges. While we take comfort in knowing we aren't the only ones who have travelled this path, we know we have work to do. Help us with our discipline. Guide us with our discipleship. Show us the way we need to go. Amen.*

## Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, 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.

**Corinthian history**—The Corinth that Paul knew was built upon the ruins of an ancient Greek city called Ephyra. As a leading Greek city, it had survived much of the Roman world’s expansion including the Peloponnesian Wars (461-446, 431-404) and the Corinthian War (395-387), but it was destroyed in 146 BCE by the Roman proconsul Lucius Mummius, who razed the city, killed the men, and sold the women and children into slavery. Mummius did such a thorough job that Corinth lay in ruins for a century, until Julius Caesar ordered that it be rebuilt in 44 BCE and populated it at first with former slaves who were granted both freedom and land as a reward for military service.

**Corinthian significance**—Corinth was an important city for a variety of reasons.

*Geographically*, it was located on a narrow isthmus (4 mi. X 10 mi.) between Greece proper and a large peninsula called the Peloponnesus. This made it an important stop on the trade route from the East, and a bustling trade city that controlled two ports. In Paul’s day, it was much harder. Goods or even smaller ships brought into the port of Cenchræe



through the Saronic Gulf from the Mediterranean side of the isthmus could be carted across the narrow land corridor on a stone track called the *diolkos*, then ship out again from the port of Lechaion and sent into the Corinthian Gulf, allowing faster access to points west. In the late 19th century, a canal was cut across the isthmus, but it is rarely used, because modern ships can easily go the long way around.

*Politically*, Corinth was the center of Roman government for the province of Achaia.

*Economically*, Corinth was considered the “Fourth City” of the Roman Empire.

*Ethnically*, Corinth was an eclectic, cosmopolitan city, no longer Greek, but settled by many former Roman soldiers who were given land, along with immigrants from all over, including Jews from the diaspora. The city was known as a rowdy place, famous for its immorality and wantonness. The phrase “to Corinthianize” has been used to mean “to become immoral.”

## Digging Deeper *continued*



the same god), Aphrodite-Venus, Demeter-Ceres and Kore-Persephone were established, along with temples to Apollo and Asklepius (the remains of the temple to Apollo are pictured at left). Eastern and Egyptian deities also had adherents in the city. Thus, Christians in Corinth had to contend with many well-established and very tempting religions. Issues raised in the letter provide evidence that rituals of their pagan neighbors had a strong influence on the church's worship.

*Religiously*, Corinth harbored a variety of belief systems, including adherence to the old Greek gods, to the Roman gods, mystery religions, Judaism, and an incipient form of Gnosticism that would prove to be a serious threat to the early church. Idolatry was common, and citizens were encouraged to participate in the imperial cult and worship the Roman emperor. Temples to Poseidon-Neptune (Greek and Roman names for

**Corinthian immigrants**—The edict of Claudius expelling Christians from Rome is mentioned in Acts 18:2 is also known from other sources including the writings of Josephus, Suetonius, and Dio Cassius. Josephus, a Jewish-Roman historian who would have been a contemporary to the event, said the edict took place in the ninth year of Claudius' rule. Suetonius, who was born after the events, researched and wrote biographies of Rome's first 12 emperors.

He said of Claudius: "He expelled from Rome the Jews constantly making disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus." (Suetonius, *Claudius*, 25; from Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology* [Liturgical Press, 1983], 138–39).

Scholars typically assume that "Chrestus" is an alternate spelling for "Christus," but it is not clear whether Claudius was concerned with Jews who were agitating against Christ-followers, or if the work of Christian missionaries had led to an uprising.

**A Corinthian date**—Paul's first visit to Corinth is the most securely dated encounter in his known missionary career. The account in Acts 18 says that Paul was brought before proconsul Lucius Junius Gallio (Acts 18), a brother of the famed rhetorician and writer Seneca the Younger. An inscription found in Corinth independently dates Gallio's rule to either 50-51, 51-52, or possibly 52-53 CE. When Paul was brought before Gallio on charges of unlawful activity, Gallio dismissed the charges, showing little regard for the concerns of the Jews (Acts 18:12-17).

**Corinthian contacts**—An awareness of Paul's contacts with the church offers a guide to understanding the letter's basic structure: chapters 1-6 seem to deal mostly with problems Paul had learned about from "Chloe's people" who had visited him, while sections of chapters 7-16 relate directly to issues raised in the church's letter requesting his advice.

## Digging Deeper *continued*

**A Corinthian correspondent**—In the opening lines of the letter, Paul sent greetings from “our brother Sosthenes.” This person is unknown to us, unless he happened to be a converted synagogue leader. A Jewish spokesman named Sosthenes had brought charges against Paul before the proconsul Gallio (Acts 18:17). He would have had to undergo a conversion as remarkable as Paul’s to have become a companion in ministry, but it is possible, because another synagogue leader named Crispus did become a believer, according to Acts 18:8, and Paul himself baptized him (1 Cor. 1:14). Whether the Sosthenes credited with contributing to the letter is this person or not, Paul would not have mentioned him if he had not been someone the Corinthian community would have known and respected.

**The Corinthian church**—The word Paul uses for church is *ekklesia*, the root of our English words like “ecclesiology” (the study of the church), “ecclesiastical” (relating to the church or its clergy), and “ecumenical,” referring to fellowship or activities involving different faith groups.

The word *ekklesia*, which means “gathering,” was typically used in Greek versions of the Old Testament to translate *qahal*, used to describe the congregation of Israel during the wilderness wandering or in gatherings at the temple. This is why the Hebrew Bible’s book of Qohelet (a participle formed from *qahal*, meaning “one who gathers”) is called Ecclesiastes in English Bibles.

The church at Corinth was known for dissension, sniping, and misbehavior among the members. When I was in seminary, the late professor Malcolm Tolbert once quipped that it must have been a Baptist church, because the only way for a church to get in such bad shape was to have total freedom, and to totally misuse it.

# The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, 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.

## What does it mean to be “called”?

Paul often used the language of calling, and nowhere more clearly than in today’s text. Paul said he was “called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God” (v. 1). He asserted that the believers in Corinth were sanctified in Christ Jesus and “called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours” (v. 2). By the faithfulness of God, he continued, they were “called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (v. 9).

Language about calling reappears in 1:26, and is particularly prominent in chapter 7, where Paul urged the believers to remember the state in which they were called and to be faithful in the new relationship with Christ to which they had been called.

Paul did not provide a comprehensive statement about his theology of calling, but it is clear that he believed the Christian’s calling originates with God and is mediated through Christ.

In modern thought, we often think of “calling” as a sign of belief that God has chosen someone for a particular type of ministry: we say someone is “called to preach” or “called to the mission field.” While this individualistic concept has validity with reference to one’s seeking a vocational direction that pleases God, professional ministers are no more “called” than any other believers.

Paul reminded the Corinthians that they were “called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (v. 9). The word translated as “fellowship” by the NRSV is *koinonia*, which emphasizes the sense of community: Christ-followers are called to be part of the corporate body of Christ that we think of as the church universal. As Paul put it, believers in Corinth and elsewhere are “called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours” (v. 2).

Calling, then, has both personal and corporate components. Paul, perhaps because he expected Christ to return soon, emphasized the importance of living out one’s call in whatever station of life one found himself or herself, even if it was the life of a slave (7:17-24). Paul acknowledged that one’s life circumstances could change (slaves could become free, for example), but the exercise of one’s calling as a faithful believer was not dependent on changing one’s station in life.

Our calling is not so much to *do* something as to *be* the person God has in mind, whatever our life situation. The Corinthians, Scott Nash has written, “were not called to follow a script; they were called to *be* someone . . . For Paul, this calling *in* life was also a calling *into* a certain quality of life” (*1 Corinthians*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary [Smyth & Helwys, 2009], 71).

## The Hardest Question *continued*

Nash goes on to cite Frederick Buechner's frequently quoted observation about calling: "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet" (*Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* [Harper & Row, 1973], 95). That place might be among the ranks of professional ministers, but it may just as well be expressed in the love of friends or co-workers, through community ministries, through public service, or by whatever means we engage the world around us. Our calling is not just to do things, but to be who we truly are.