

Adult Teaching Resources

January 16, 2022



Season after Christmas

Psalms 147:1-20—"A Good Beginning"

In Christ We Have ...

Season of Epiphany

Acts 8:4-17 (RCL 8:14-17)—"Amazing Grace"

1 Corinthians 12:1-11—"Amazing Gifts"

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a—"Amazing Oneness"

1 Corinthians 13:1-13—"Amazing Love"

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“Amazing Gifts”

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

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. 12:12—For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

Opening

After everyone arrives, remain in the large group for the opening activity. Open your lesson with conversation around these questions.

What does it mean to be gifted in the world?

Using that definition, who is gifted in what ways?

What does it mean to be gifted in the realm of faith?

Using that definition, who is gifted in what ways?

What gifts do you see at work within your class and your church?

Spend some time talking about gifts and giftedness before moving to the Bible.

Reading the Bible

What does this passage speak to? (spiritual gifts) Why does Paul write about this? (he doesn't want them to be uninformed)

How does Paul describe them when they were pagans? (they were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak)

What does he want them to understand? (that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says “Let Jesus be cursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit)

Paul lists three “varieties,” what are they? (gifts, services, activities) Paul also lists three “sames,” what are they? (Spirit, Lord, God)

What is given to each? (the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good)

What spiritual gifts are given? (the utterance of wisdom, the utterance of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, the working of miracles, prophecy, the discernment of spirits, various kinds of tongues, the interpretation of tongues)

How are these gifts activated? (by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses)

Making Connections

When in your life have you been totally and fully in line with God's call and mission? When in your life have you struggled a bit with remaining faithful to God's call and mission? What happened to get you back on track?

When in your church's history has your church been totally and fully in line with God's call and mission? When in your church's history has your church struggled a bit with remaining faithful to God's call and mission? What happened to get your church back on track?

What issues face the church today that presents problems and issues for the church? What can the church do to effectively address those problems and issues?

Do you think it is possible to point to one thing as proof that someone has received God's Spirit? Why do you say that? Who, in your opinion, has received the Spirit? How do you make that determination?

Our Lesson Writer shares, "The issue of spiritual gifts had caused division and strife at Corinth, but Paul knew the Spirit promotes harmony rather than discord." What causes division and strife in churches today? How are those issues similar to what the church at Corinth faced? How are they different?

What is your definition of the gift of wisdom? How do you see wisdom being used as a gift in the church? In the community?

What is your definition of the gift of knowledge? How do you see knowledge being used as a gift in the church? In the community?

What is your definition of the gift of faith? How do you see faith being used as a gift in the church? In the community?

What is your definition of the gift of healing? How do you see healing being used as a gift in the church? In the community?

What is your definition of the gift of the working of miracles? How do you see the working of miracles being used as a gift in the church? In the community?

What is your definition of the gift of prophecy? How do you see prophecy being used as a gift in the church? In the community?

What is your definition of the gift of the discernment of spirits? How do you see the discernment of spirits being used as a gift in the church? In the community?

What is your definition of the gift of tongues? How do you see tongues being used as a gift in the church? In the community?

What is your definition of the gift of the interpretation of tongues? How do you see the interpretation of tongues being used as a gift in the church? In the community?

So What?

Have your group remain together. Give each person a piece of paper and a pen or a pencil. Then, share these words from our Lesson Writer:

“...Paul concluded, there is one Spirit at work to energize all believers with the presence and the power of God’s grace gifts. The gifts are allotted “to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses,” but their purpose is communal, to build up the church in unity and love.”

Ask each person to think of how the Spirit has been (and continues to be) at work in their lives. Have them think about the gift(s) they think God has blessed them with. Ask them to write down their gift(s) on the piece of paper.

Collect all the papers. Then, read each page, one at a time, giving the group time to guess who wrote the gifts they see in themselves. After correctly guessing each person, ask the group what gift(s), if any, they would add to that list, affirming the God-given giftedness we enjoy.

After every page has been read and everyone has been affirmed with their gift(s) and a few more from the group, ask everyone to consider how they can best use their gifts for the church, for the community, and for the kingdom of God.

Open the floor for volunteers to share how they think they can best use their gifts for God.

The Challenge

This week, use your gift in a way that builds the kingdom of God. Be intentional about what you do. After you use your gift, pray and give thanks to God for the opportunity to use your gift.

Prayer

Loving God, thank you for your Spirit and the gifts we are all given by the Spirit. Help us to understand our giftedness better so that we can use what we’ve been given to share your love and grace with the world. Help us to hold each other accountable with our gifts so that we can work together to build your kingdom. 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 lessons—This week’s lesson begins a series of six lessons from Paul’s Corinthian correspondence. A text from Psalm 138 will interrupt halfway through, because 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 (the epistle for February 6) also typically shows up as an Easter text in the lectionary cycle—and we used it for our Easter lesson last April.

The church in Corinth—It may be helpful to remember some highlights (and lowlights) in Paul’s ongoing relationship with the church in Corinth.

Paul first visited the important city of Corinth and founded the church during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-18, c. 50-51 C.E.). The letter we know as 1 Corinthians was written from Ephesus during Paul’s third journey, but it presupposes an earlier letter dealing with immorality in the church (1 Cor. 5:9). Some scholars think a fragment of this earlier letter has been preserved as 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1, which deals with immorality and doesn’t really fit into its present context.

After sending the first letter, Paul heard from a group in the church he identifies as “Chloe’s people” (1:11) and also seems to have received a letter from Corinth (7:1). He responded with the letter we call 1 Corinthians, apparently dealing with the issues raised by Chloe’s people in chapters 1-6, and by the letter he had received in chapters 7-16 (cf. 7:1; 7:25; 8:1; 12:1).

The Corinthians responded to Paul’s letter with some hostility, requiring him to make a “painful visit” from Ephesus to the church (2 Cor. 2:1). After returning to Ephesus, he wrote a strongly worded letter and sent it by Titus (2 Cor. 2:3-9; 7:12). Parts of this “severe letter” may be preserved in 2 Cor. 10-13, which is harsher than the conciliatory tone of the surrounding text.

Paul was still burdened for the Corinthians when he left Ephesus. He hoped to meet Titus in Troas and learn how the letter was received, but he did not find Titus there, and restlessly moved on to Macedonia (2 Cor. 2:12). There he met Titus, who reported that the Corinthians had accepted the letter with grace and had been reconciled to Paul (2 Cor. 7:5-16). Paul then wrote 2 Corinthians to express his joy and to encourage the church at Corinth to raise a worthy offering for the poor in Jerusalem (2 Cor. 9). He later wintered in Greece, probably at Corinth (Acts 20:1-3) before proceeding to Jerusalem with the offering.

Gifts, or people?—The word *pneumatikōn* can be either neuter or masculine, and appears alone (there’s no word for “gifts” in the verse), so it could possibly be translated as “spiritual persons” as well as “spiritual things/gifts.” Since the context relates to expressions commonly associated with the concept of spiritual gifts, however, translators generally choose that option.

Digging Deeper *continued*

Spiritual words—While Paul introduced chapters 12-14 by raising the topic of “spiritual things” (*pneumatikōn*), his vocabulary leans to the use of other words, as Scott Nash points out in the *1 Corinthians* volume of the Smyth & Helwys Commentary series:

Rather than refer to manifestations of the Spirit as *pneumatika*, he calls them “services” (*diakonia*), “workings” (*energēmata*), and especially “gifts” (*charismata*). Whereas referring to such manifestations as “spiritual things” may place the emphasis on the possessor of those manifestations, his preference for “gifts” places the emphasis properly on the Spirit as the source. (*1 Corinthians*, Smyth & Helwys Commentary Series [Smyth & Helwys, 2009], p. 355)

In today’s world, those who emphasize spiritual gifts (especially on “speaking in tongues”) are commonly called “Charismatics” (from the Greek word for “grace gift”) or “Pentecostals” (from the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost). The fastest growing Christian movements in the world are mainly in the southern hemisphere, and they are largely charismatic in character. For this reason, if nothing else, we should give attention to Paul’s comments on the subject.

Tongues among the pagans—Tongues-speaking was a feature of some ancient cults or mystery religions, though it was more common among priests than worshipers. At the famed oracle at Delphi, a specially chosen priestess called “the Pythia” responded to questions by going into a trance and uttering unintelligible words, with attendants on hand to “interpret,” generally in cryptic fashion. The ancients believed that the message had been given by the god Apollo, but it is thought that methane or some other gas leaking from the earth into the Pythia’s closed chamber could have caused her trance and resulting hallucinations.

A Trinitarian reference?—Some readers believe Paul’s comments in vv. 4-7 may reflect an early Trinitarian understanding. To the *Spirit* Paul attributes varieties of gifts, while he says the *Lord* (Jesus) assigns the diverse “services” requiring these gifts (or “ministries”—the word is *diakonia*), and *God* distributes the power to perform them (“activates” is from the Greek *energēmata*: one could translate it as “energize”).

We should be careful not to read the Council of Nicea back into 1 Corinthians, however. Paul can talk about one God in different terms, and about the various ways that God works among us, but his point is that the one God gifts and calls all believers to one purpose. There is no “one” gift above all others or prerequisite to others: all believers are gifted, and all are to use their gifts for the good of the whole.

A gift, or not?—It may be significant that, while Paul speaks of tongues as being activated by the Spirit, he does not use the terminology of “gifts” when talking about them. Scott Nash has noted: “Not to be overlooked as well is the fact that Paul never directly refers to tongues or their interpretation as a *charisma* (‘gift’), which is ironic in light of what has come to be emphasized among ‘charismatic’ Christians” (Nash, p. 360).

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

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Who would ever want to say “Let Jesus be accursed”?

Paul’s statement that no one speaking by the Spirit of God could ever say “Let Jesus be cursed” is difficult to translate, in part because the phrase has no verb: *anathema Iēsous* literally means “accursed Jesus,” so translators typically add a verb of being “accursed be Jesus,” or “let Jesus be accursed.” It’s not unusual to see a Greek phrase in which the verb of being is understood.

Bruce Winter has argued that Paul’s reference might have been to the possibility of someone pronouncing a curse on someone, and doing it in the name of Jesus. If so, Paul could have been saying that anyone inspired by the Spirit could not pronounce a “Jesus curse” on anyone (*After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* [Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2001], 164–83; cited by Scott Nash, *1 Corinthians*, Smyth & Helwys Commentary Series [Smyth & Helwys, 2009], p. 358).

Many ancient peoples held to a strong belief in the power of the spoken word, imagining that the very speaking of a blessing or a curse might set the process in motion, especially when endorsed by a god. In Greek and Roman culture, curses could be inscribed on pottery, engraved on tombs, or written in other ways. Four lead tablets found in the ruins of the temple of Demeter and Kore in ancient Corinth were inscribed with curses invoking pagan gods, as were four other lead tablets from the nearby “Cave of the Lamps.”

Christians may have occasionally pronounced formal curses, as well. Although the text is incomplete, a lamp found in the same cave was inscribed “I invoke you by the great God Sabbaoth, by Michael, by Gabriel, in order that you . . .” (Richard M. Rothaus, *Corinth: the First City of Greece, An Urban History of Late Antique Cult and Religion* [Leiden: Brill, 2000], p.130; also cited by Nash, p. 358).

The remainder of such curses generally called for someone to either do something or avoid something, to be cursed if they did not comply.

Winter’s proposal is intriguing, but if Paul had been referring to a “Jesus curse,” he could have said it much more clearly. It’s more likely that he was saying that if someone felt compelled or pressured to say “Jesus is cursed,” even under persecution, a Spirit-empowered person would not do so.