



First Corinthians

The Church and the Christian Community

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West Chester, Pennsylvania

First Corinthians: The Church and the Christian Community is a resource of *The Great Adventure™* Catholic Bible Study Program.

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Welcome to *The Great Adventure*™



“To fall in love with God is the greatest of all romances; to seek him, the greatest adventure.”
– St. Augustine of Hippo

The Bible is at the heart of our Catholic Faith—and our relationship with God. It is the living Word of God, where our Father meets with us and lovingly speaks to us. Reading the Bible should bring us closer to Christ, but understanding it is not always easy. Many people tell us they have tried time and again to prayerfully read Scripture, but they get frustrated because they “just don’t get it.”

The Great Adventure is designed so that anyone can make sense of the Bible and experience the life-changing power of God’s Word. At the core of *The Great Adventure* is the concept that there is a story running through the seventy-three books of the Bible that ties all of Scripture together and makes sense not just of the Bible, but of our lives as well.

That story is God’s plan as it has unfolded throughout salvation history and continues to unfold today. Once we grasp this “big picture,” the readings at Mass begin to make more sense, our Scripture reading and study come to life, and we see how our lives fit into God’s loving plan.

Hundreds of thousands of participants have discovered the riches of Scripture by experiencing one or more *Great Adventure* Bible studies. It is our prayer that you will gain a newfound understanding of God’s Word that will transform your life and bring you closer to Christ.

Jeff Cavins, creator and president, *The Great Adventure*
Sarah Christmyer, co-developer and author, *The Great Adventure*

About *The Great Adventure* Catholic Bible Study Program

At the core of *The Great Adventure* is *The Bible Timeline*™ Learning System: a simple way to get the “big picture” of the Bible by focusing on the story that runs throughout Sacred Scripture. *Great Adventure* Bible studies explore the biblical narrative in light of Catholic teaching and the historical, cultural, and literary context of the Scriptures to discover what Scripture reveals about God’s plan and our place within it. Studies of individual books of the Bible are supplemented by thematic and “life application” studies.

Every *Great Adventure* study is designed to foster:

- Familiarity with the Bible and ease of reading it
- Bible study habits consistent with the guidelines of the Catholic Church
- Personal engagement in the Word of God
- Faith-sharing based on the Word of God
- Growth in knowledge about Scripture and the Catholic Faith

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About *First Corinthians*: *The Church and the Christian Community*



The conflicts of the early Christians in Corinth are in many ways similar to our struggles today as Christians. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians about divisions, immorality, persecution, and other trials of the faithful is a much-needed message for our own times. St. Paul taught the Corinthians about the nature of grace and the Church as the body of Christ. Most importantly, he introduced the Corinthian Christians to the most powerful gift of all, the Eucharist.

Materials

Materials for *First Corinthians: The Church and the Christian Community* include:

- **Workbook:** contains engaging study questions, session summaries, home reading assignments, maps, charts, and diagrams as well as talk notes and responses to the questions. (You will need one workbook for every participant, study leader, and small-group facilitator.)
- **Video Presentations** (eleven 30-minute sessions): presented by Tim Gray, these eleven video presentations provide comprehensive teaching and commentary on First Corinthians. (You will need one DVD set.)

In addition, every participant, leader, and small-group facilitator should have a Catholic Bible and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. For this study, we recommend *The Great Adventure Catholic Bible*, an RSV-2CE Bible that incorporates the same color-coded *Bible Timeline* Learning System that you will use throughout this program.

How the Study Works

Every *Great Adventure* study includes four essential steps, which are designed to fit together and build upon each other. Following these steps in order will help you to get the most out of each session.



STEP ONE: HOME PREPARATION

NOTE: There is no home preparation required for the first week, Introduction.

Each session begins with personal study that involves reading Scripture and answering a series of questions that will help you understand and think more deeply about what you have read. Some questions will include additional reading from other parts of the Bible or from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to help you consider the passage in light of the bigger picture of salvation history and Catholic teaching.

We recommend that you allow at least 90 minutes to complete the reading and answer the questions for each session. We also suggest that home preparation be done in several sittings over the course of a week. This will help you create a habit of daily Bible reading and prayerful meditation.

STEP TWO: SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION

The small-group discussion is one of the most effective components of a *Great Adventure* Bible study. During this discussion, members of your small group will have an opportunity to share their insights into the Scripture reading. The goal of the small-group discussion is to help participants obtain a richer understanding of the readings and apply them to their lives. Trained facilitators guide the small-group discussion and keep it on track. To learn how to facilitate a small-group discussion, visit ascensionpress.com. Be sure to follow the “Ten Commandments of Small-Group Discussion” on page xi.

STEP THREE: VIDEO PRESENTATION

Tim Gray wraps up each session with a video presentation that offers unique insights and profound connections to help you gain a deeper understanding of the Bible and its relationship to the Catholic Faith, with a special emphasis on ways to apply what you have learned to your life.

STEP FOUR: REVIEW OF RESPONSES

NOTE: There are no responses for the first week, Introduction.

The final step—reviewing the responses at the back of this workbook—is done at home prior to beginning the reading for the next session. These responses will help you read the Scripture passages for the next session in the proper context.

For the most effective study experience, complete these steps in the following order: (1) Read and answer the questions; (2) discuss them in your small group; (3) view the video presentation; and (4) review the responses. During the discussion, your small-group facilitator will incorporate points found in the responses, but the richness that comes from individual insights can be lost when participants view the responses prior to the discussion.

For more information about how to plan and promote a Bible study and how to facilitate a small-group discussion, visit ascensionpress.com or call 1-800-376-0520.

Session Outline and Reading Guide

Each session in this workbook has the following sections. (Note: The Introduction follows a different format.)

1. Session Questions (used during Step 1: Home Preparation and Step 2: Small-Group Discussion)

- A. Establish (or Review) the Context
- B. Read the Story
- C. Take a Deeper Look
- D. Application

2. Session Talk Notes (used during Step 3: Video Presentation)

3. Session Responses (used during Step 4: Review of Responses)

The following chart offers an overview of the home preparation readings assigned in each session of the study. The main reading is provided in section B, **Read the Story**, and should be read before you answer the session questions. Additional Bible readings and *Catechism* readings are provided in section C, **Take a Deeper Look**, and should be read as you answer the study questions for each session.

Session (Video Time)	Main Reading	Additional Bible Readings	Catechism Readings (CCC)
Introduction (28:00)	—	—	—
1. 1 Corinthians 1:1-9: Paul's Greeting to the Corinthians (27:17)	Acts 18:1-18; 1 Corinthians 1:1-9	Jeremiah 1:7-8, 1:18-19; Acts 2:42, 18:9-10, 18:26; Romans 16:3-5; 1 Corinthians 1:24, 16:19; Ephesians 4:1-3	—
2. 1 Corinthians 1:10-3:4: Division, Wisdom, and Pride in Corinth (27:45)	1 Corinthians 1:10-3:4	Jeremiah 9:23-24; Philippians 2:1-13; 1 John 3:1	759
3. 1 Corinthians 3:5-4:21: Servants of Christ and His Church Community (28:19)	1 Corinthians 3:5-4:21	2 Chronicles 2:1, 2:11-12; Job 5:13; Psalm 94:11; Isaiah 5:1-2, 5:7, 29:14, 40:13, 64:4, 65:17; Jeremiah 9:24; Hosea 10:1, 10:13; John 15:1-5	756
4. 1 Corinthians 5-7: Immorality – Assimilation Versus Isolation (28:20)	1 Corinthians 5-7	Leviticus 18:1-8; Ezra 10:6; Daniel 9:2-10; Matthew 18:15-18, 18:21-35; Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11	827, 1452-1453
5. 1 Corinthians 8-9: Eating Meat Offered to Idols Versus Love of Neighbor (28:19)	1 Corinthians 8-9	Deuteronomy 6:4; Romans 5:6; Philippians 2:3-8; 1 Peter 1:4	—
6. 1 Corinthians 10:1-11:1: Imitating Israel in Corinth (28:20)	1 Corinthians 10:1-11:1	Exodus 15:24, 16:2, 17:3, 32:1-8; Numbers 21:4-9, 25:1-18; Sirach 21:2; Wisdom 1:5	—

Session (Video Time)	Main Reading	Additional Bible Readings	Catechism Readings (CCC)
7. 1 Corinthians 11:2–12:31: True Worship (28:19)	1 Corinthians 11:2–12:31	Proverbs 21:13; James 2:1-4, 2:8	—
8. 1 Corinthians 13–14: Love and Building Up the Church (28:20)	1 Corinthians 13–14	Wisdom 15:1; John 13:34, 15:9-10; Romans 2:4	—
9. 1 Corinthians 15: Resurrection (28:20)	1 Corinthians 15	Deuteronomy 18:4; Proverbs 3:9; Sirach 35:8	652
10. 1 Corinthians 16: Paul's Closing Words (28:19)	1 Corinthians 16	Acts 20:7; 2 Corinthians 9:1-10	337, 346, 2174, 2177

What to Do for Each Session

1. Welcome and Introduction (10 minutes)
2. Small-Group Discussion (40 minutes)

Note to Study Leaders: There is no small-group discussion for the first week. Instead, use this time to divide participants into small groups of eight to twelve people, ensure that everyone has the study materials, and explain how the study works. Each small group should be led by a trained facilitator.

3. Video Presentation (30 minutes)
4. Closing and Prayer (5 minutes)

Getting the Most Out of This Study

This study will help you understand the Bible in a new way. The “head knowledge” you gain will help you grow in “heart knowledge” as you follow up on what you have learned. The Bible will always remain a mystery, though, and that is part of the beauty of it: We can never exhaust the treasures of Scripture. Fortunately for us, the Bible is not a subject to master; it is a place to encounter the living Word of God.

Whenever you open your Bible to read, *start with prayer*, and place yourself in God’s presence. You might take Samuel’s prayer as your own: “Speak, LORD, for your servant hears” (1 Samuel 3:9). When you read, adopt an attitude of listening. Try not to treat Scripture as a text, but as a personal message from God. What is he saying? What does it mean? What does it mean for my life? If you come to the Word focused on having an encounter with the Lord, he will speak to your heart, and you will be transformed.

An Important Note About the Responses to the Study Questions

Responses to the study questions are provided in the back of this workbook. These responses do not exhaust the meaning that can be found in the Scripture reading. People will have unique insights. The responses have two important functions:

1. The first purpose of the responses is to provide participants with a review of each session, which will help establish a context for the reading and questions in the following session. The best time to read the responses is just before starting on the next session.
2. The second purpose of the responses is to provide guidelines for the small-group facilitators.
Facilitators: Complete the Scripture reading and answer the questions on your own before reading the responses in preparation for facilitating the small-group discussion.

Participants should not review the responses for each session until after the session is completed. Although it might be tempting to look at these responses in advance, it is important to wait, for the following reasons.

1. Bible study is not about simply watching a video presentation or reading a Bible commentary. It is just as important to immerse yourself in the Word of God itself and engage it with your heart and mind. The questions in *The Great Adventure* studies are designed to draw you into the Scriptures so that the Word of God will be planted and grow in your heart. Reading a response written by someone else may satisfy your mind for a moment, but it will not result in the kind of growth that will occur if you attempt to answer the question on your own first.
2. The success of a small group depends on a good discussion. A group of participants who have spent time pondering the Scripture passages on their own will have more varied insights to discuss.

For these reasons, please wait to read the responses until after the session. When you follow the steps of this study as intended, you will explore the Word of God in different ways—in the reading, the small-group discussion, the video presentation, and finally the responses. Follow these steps over time, and you will be more than fed—you will learn to feed yourself.

Ten Commandments of Small-Group Discussion¹

1. Enjoy yourself!
2. Speak with respect and charity.
3. Do not ridicule or dismiss what others say. Keep comments positive.
4. Come prepared.
5. If you were not able to prepare, let others speak first.
6. Stick to the topic and questions at hand.
7. Start and end on time.
8. Allow silence. Give people a chance to think.
9. Listen to others without interrupting.
10. Keep personal matters within the group.

¹ Adapted from Thomas Smith's original "10 Commandments of a Small Group."

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Introduction



The Sack of Corinth by Thomas Allom

Author and Date

St. Paul is the author of First Corinthians. He was a Jew (educated in the *Torah* at the feet of Gamaliel) who persecuted the first Christians until his conversion on the road to Damascus (see Acts 9:1-19 and 22:3-16). In the years between his conversion and his missionary journeys, Paul had plenty of time to let the light of faith illumine his knowledge of the Old Testament writings and prophecies in the light of Jesus Christ. The fulfillment of God's plan in Jesus Christ and the Church was the foundation from which Paul preached, taught, and wrote to the new Christians in the various new communities he formed.

Paul made three missionary journeys, and it was during his second missionary journey, described in Acts 15:36–18:22, that Paul first visited Corinth and established a new Christian church community there. Paul probably arrived in Corinth sometime in late AD 49, staying more than eighteen months. In his preaching and teaching, Paul initially turned his attention to the Jewish community, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the promised Messiah. However, when his message was rejected, Paul turned his focus to the Gentiles in Corinth, and many were baptized. A couple of years later, sometime around the spring of AD 52, Paul set out on his third missionary journey (see Acts 18:23–21:17) to strengthen the Christian disciples throughout the regions of Galatia and Achaia. (In the time of Paul, the Roman province of Achaia included central Greece, Attica, and the Peloponnese peninsula.) Once Paul arrived in Ephesus, he remained there more than two years. Ephesus acted like a central hub, with the “spokes” to Paul's new Christian churches being nearly the same distance in length “as the crow flies.” Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians during this extended stay in Ephesus in the midst of his third missionary journey.

Paul's Second Missionary Journey



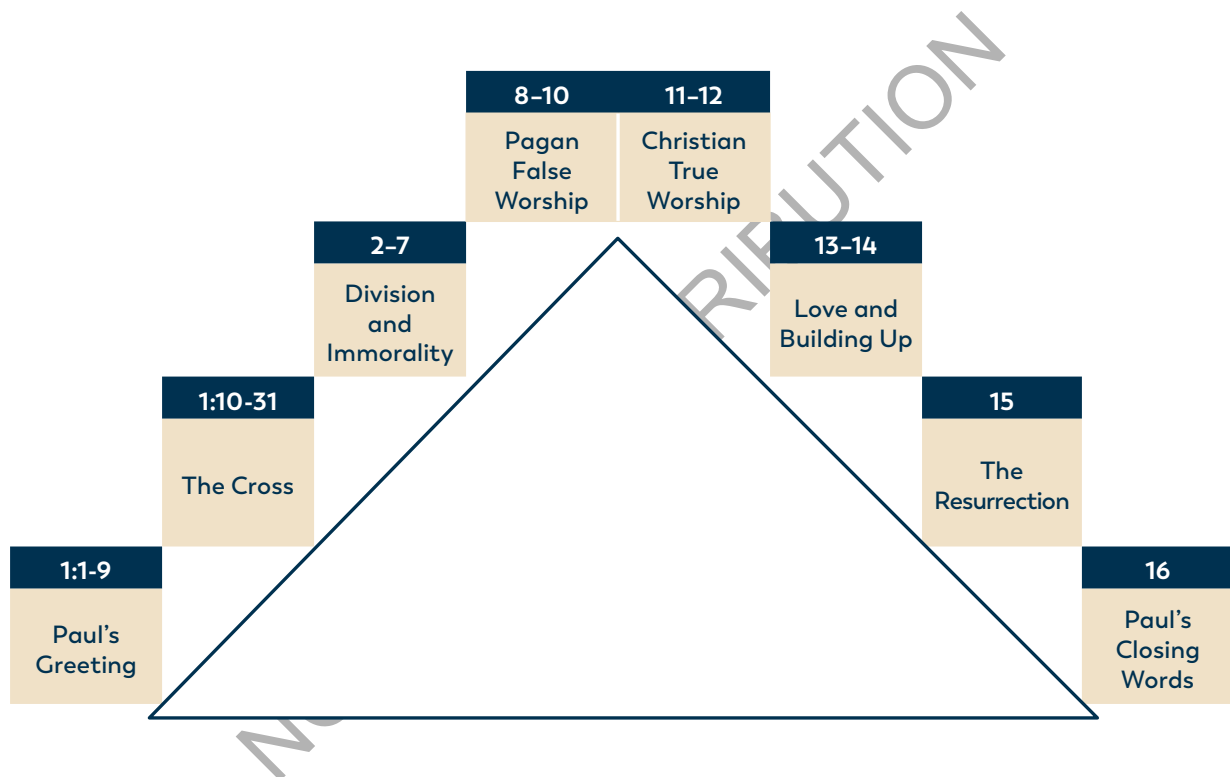
Paul's Third Missionary Journey



While in Ephesus, Paul received word of division and quarreling as well as immoral practices in the Corinthian church. In addition, Paul received a letter from the Corinthians themselves seeking direction on several issues. Unable at that time to make another trip to Corinth, Paul wrote First Corinthians and sent it on ahead. Having a fatherly concern for his children in the Faith at Corinth, Paul writes with the hope that his direction, correction, and exhortation in this letter will help to restore unity and encourage a return to Christian holiness.

Overview

Paul's letter to the Corinthians addresses a myriad of issues, and as a result, the letter can be difficult to follow. Also, the numerous topics addressed can give the casual reader the false impression that Paul is addressing these as separate, unconnected problems. This is not the case. As the chart below illustrates, Paul's letter is far from an unordered list of topics. It is, rather, a well-ordered movement from division to unity, centered on right worship and framed by the Cross and the Resurrection.



As we work through Paul's letter, it will become clear that while Paul does address numerous topics, he is also showing the Corinthians that at the core of so many of their problems is a lack of charity for their brothers and sisters. And Paul will give the Corinthians the best reason to persevere in charity: the hope that comes from Christ's resurrection.

Reading Someone Else's Mail

When we read First Corinthians today at Mass in our parishes and during our personal reading of Scripture, it is important to remember that although we can apply its message to our own lives, it was originally written to a specific community at a specific time in history. Because of this, reading First Corinthians is a lot like reading someone else's mail. We only have half the conversation: We have Paul's words to the Corinthians, but we do not have the exact questions the Corinthian community asked Paul. We can only surmise the original questions from Paul's answers, which can make it difficult to be sure we are putting the whole story back together again.

correctly. When Paul sat down and penned this letter, he was writing to a particular church (the community in Corinth, Greece) during a particular time (first century AD), and to a particular culture with its own customs and practices (the Greco-Roman culture in Corinth). Many of the customs and practices of first-century Corinth are foreign to our modern culture, just as our styles and customs of speech, dress, and socially acceptable roles and interaction between men and women would be foreign to them. Thus, given that we do not know the exact questions and the specific situations to which Paul is responding, and given that he is writing to a community that lived in a culture very different from our own, we should not be surprised to find some of Paul's responses difficult to understand. St. Peter, even in his day, wrote that some things in Paul's letters were "hard to understand" (2 Peter 3:15-16). We will find this true in our study of First Corinthians. There will be a few sections that can only be understood with a more in-depth study of the Greek text and the historical setting than is possible in this short study.

Where? The Geography of Corinth

Given that the Corinthians lived in a different time, location, and culture than our own, it will be helpful to review some background information regarding Corinth and first-century life there.

The city of Corinth sits on the isthmus that connects mainland Greece to its north with Greece's Peloponnese peninsula to its south. On this isthmus, first-century Corinth sat at one of the great crossroads of the ancient world. Not only did trade flow north-south between the Greek mainland and the Peloponnese, but because it stood between Rome to the west and Syria and Egypt to the east, Corinth was also a center of east-west trade routes. Because of its central location, the seaport town of Corinth became a center not only of trade and commerce, but also of political communication between Rome and its eastern empire.

Corinth owed much of its wealth and success to the fact that it was actually two ports. The port of Lechaëum lay on the west side of the isthmus, which opened to the Gulf of Corinth and out to the Ionian and Adriatic seas, and the port of Cenchreæ on the east side of the isthmus, which opened to the Saronic Gulf and out to the Aegean Sea. (Paul himself sailed from the port at Cenchreæ; see Acts 18:18). While Lechaëum and Cenchreæ were small towns of their own, Corinth was the center for all the trade that passed between the ports and across the isthmus. Corinth's central location afforded it the advantages of proximity to the sea and ports, but protected the city from things such as surprise attacks from the sea.¹

Seeking to avoid sailing around the stormy Cape Malea on the south side of the Peloponnese and through the rough and dangerous waters of the open Mediterranean Sea, merchants preferred the calmer, sheltered Gulf of Corinth even though it meant paying for portage of goods across the isthmus.² As early as the sixth century BC, Periander (c. 627–587 BC), who ruled Corinth at that time, proposed cutting a canal through the isthmus, but the project proved insurmountable for the technology of the day (e.g., crude picks and shovels). In order to transport goods across the isthmus, Periander constructed the *diolkos*, or haulway, around 600 BC. The *diolkos* consisted of a slab-paved corridor over which goods were hauled from one coast to the other. At the time, it was the ancient world's largest feat of engineering to connect two seas.

Over the centuries, additional attempts were made to cut a canal through the natural barrier of the isthmus. It was said that Alexander the Great's attempt to do so was his only unsuccessful project.³ In 67 BC, Emperor Nero made the most serious attempt to dig a canal through the rock. But the unfinished project was abandoned so Nero could turn his attention and resources to an uprising in the West. It was not until relatively modern times (in 1893) that a canal was finally opened.

¹ Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2002), 44.

² Andrew Sherratt, "Portages (2005)," ArchAtlas, October 2006, archatlas.org/Portages/, accessed July 23, 2007.

³ Murphy-O'Connor, 10.

The Corinthians to Whom Paul Wrote and the History of Their City

With the *diolkos* constructed in the sixth century BC, Corinth quickly became a city of great wealth. Traffic resulting from the transport of goods passed through Corinth where taxes on the goods were collected. With the rise of Rome and the ensuing tensions between Rome and the ruling league in Greece, the Roman army ruthlessly sacked and destroyed the city of Corinth in 146 BC, putting many to the sword and selling others into slavery. But a century later, in 44 BC, because of its favorable trade location, the Romans rebuilt Corinth on the raised plateau just inside the old city's north wall and established a colony that would become the capital of the Roman province in Achaia. The Romans also rebuilt the port facilities at both Lechaenum and Cenchreae, thus facilitating increased trade across the isthmus.

The Greek *agora* (marketplace) remained at the center of the new rectangular, mapped city. The *agora* was of exceptional size, some 15,300 meters. The Southern Stoa, a covered walkway supported by majestic columns, lined the southern side of the *agora*. Off this walkway would have been shops and administrative offices. Located at the center of the *agora* was the *bema*, or speaker's platform, which was flanked by stairs. Public proclamations were made from the *bema*, and magistrates presided there, judging matters brought before them. Paul was brought before the tribunal at the *bema* (see Acts 18:12). In addition to shops and administrative offices, Corinth would have had baths, fountains, a stadium, and a theater capable of holding about fourteen thousand spectators. In addition to the theater, there was an amphitheater, which was used for gladiatorial shows. Given this, the Corinthians would have had an immediate image when Paul said, "I fought with beasts" (1 Corinthians 15:32).

Rebuilding a city required skilled laborers of all types, including stone-cutters, quarrymen, carpenters, metal workers and fashioners, rope makers, leather workers, weavers, those able to train and drive yoked beasts, road-builders, and artistic craftsmen. Evidence of such craftsmanship can be seen not only in the buildings and temples that arose, but also in Corinth's water system, which was one of the most complex in the ancient world.⁴ Along with skilled laborers, unskilled laborers would have been needed. In these early years of rebuilding Corinth, both skilled and unskilled people would have been able to appreciate Paul's image of constructing a building or temple with good materials and resting it on a firm foundation (see 1 Corinthians 3:9-14).

Many of those sent to rebuild the colony in Corinth were freed slaves from Rome (referred to as "freedmen") and the urban poor. For such people, a move to a new colony would have been a step up on the social ladder. Here, in the newly re-established Corinthian colony with its new money from Rome and entrepreneurs desiring to get in on the growth in the new city, there was a chance for a new beginning for those who were outcast in Rome. Those who had once been poor and in slavery in Rome could now become rich in this new economy. In fact, Corinth was one of the only cities in the area where a freedman (a former slave) could become a governor. Thus, wealth could buy what was once only accessible to noblemen, since both freed slaves and noblemen could hold office. Such access to wealth and freedom may have focused many Corinthians on their own independence at the expense of concern for those around them.

It is worth noting that among the many trades practiced in the city, Corinth was especially famous for its bronze work, which was valued for both the intrinsic worth of the metal and the craftsmanship of the pieces produced. In fact, Corinthian bronze was highly valued and sought throughout the empire. Paul seems to allude to Corinthian bronze in the image he uses in 1 Corinthians 13:1.

⁴ Murphy-O'Connor, 28-31.

Morality in Corinth

Like any prosperous port city in the Roman Empire, Corinth was rife with immorality. But the city of Corinth was infamous even in the pagan hellenistic world. Plutarch (c. AD 46–127) describes Corinth as having “a great army of prostitutes” (Plutarch’s *Moralia*, 768a). In Athens, which thought of itself as more noble, civilized, and cultivated than Corinth, the great Aristophanes (c. 450–385 BC), a poet, playwright, and comedian, came up with a new verb—“to Corinthianize”—which he used instead of the verb “to fornicate.”⁵ He talked about the Corinthians in a derogatory way: “You know what it means to Corinthianize.” The ancient world made fun of the Corinthians for their loose living and notoriously wild pagan life.

Religion in Corinth

The religion in Corinth, as in most Greco-Roman cities, was polytheistic. Numerous temples built to honor Greek, Roman, and other pagan gods, including the Egyptian goddess Isis, could be found in the city and the surrounding area. On the streets were statues to all kinds of gods, including Artemis, Dionysus, Poseidon, Apollo, Hermes, Zeus, and Aphrodite, and a bronze statue of Athena stood in the middle of the *agora*.⁶ Not far from the *agora* stood the majestic temple to Apollo, which was surrounded by thirty-eight Doric columns, each twenty-four feet tall and six feet in diameter. (Seven of these columns can still be seen today in the temple’s ruins.) And in the southern backdrop of the city, atop the Acropolis (literally, “highest city”) was the temple to Aphrodite. One writer, Strabo (c. 64 BC – AD 24), wrote that in the old city of Corinth, before Corinth was destroyed in 146 BC and the new city that Paul visited was built, the temple of Aphrodite had “more than a thousand temple-slaves, [or] prostitutes.”⁷ Even if this were an exaggeration, it illustrates the practice of temple prostitution that was sometimes associated with pagan worship, particularly in the East. No matter which way one looked, there was evidence of the polytheistic beliefs the Corinthians were so accustomed to and that were so contrary to Christianity.

Temples in the ancient world commonly practiced animal sacrifice. Meat from these sacrifices was either sold in the marketplace or feasted upon in banquet rooms connected to or near the temple. Because of this, pagan temples were also like modern-day restaurants. Eating in these temple banquet rooms included not only meat sacrificed to idols, but plenty of wine, which often led to drunkenness and sexual orgies. This scenario proved problematic for those Corinthians who converted to Christianity but were accustomed to enjoying a meal at the local temple restaurant. This problem and the ensuing debate become the focus of Paul’s letter beginning at 1 Corinthians 8.

Sports in Corinth

Corinth was home to the Isthmian games, one of the four Panhellenic festivals. While the Olympic games would have been the most popular, the Isthmian games would have ranked second. Initiated in 582 BC, the Isthmian games took place every two years in April and May. During the time of Paul’s visits to Corinth, the games would have taken place in 49 and 51 BC. The crown received for victory in the Isthmian games was made from sprigs of celery. Paul refers to this “perishable wreath” in 1 Corinthians 9.

After trade and commerce over the isthmus, the Isthmian games were the second largest source of wealth for the city of Corinth. Sports were such a big deal to the Corinthians and their economy that the president of the games had his own office among the administrative offices off the Southern Stoa on the *agora*. Being named the president of the games was one of the most prestigious offices to which a citizen in Corinth could aspire.

⁵ Murphy-O’Connor, 56–57.

⁶ Murphy-O’Connor, 24–25.

⁷ Murphy-O’Connor, 55–56.

After the sack of Corinth in 146 BC, the games probably took place in a neighboring town. But it appears that the games returned to Corinth around 40 BC. The newly developing Roman colony in Corinth would have been eager to have the games returned to Corinth so it could reap the profits from both the influx of training competitors and the enormous crowds of spectators who would descend on the town for the competitions. In fact, so many people came to these games that the city population could quadruple during the spring months when they took place. The city grew so much and so quickly during the games that tent cities popped up around Corinth, because there was not enough housing in the city for all the people who flocked there for the games. Paul describes himself as a tentmaker (see Acts 18:3), so he likely spent his time in Corinth making tents for people coming to the Isthmian games.

Given the powerful influence of the Isthmian games on Corinth's economy and life, Paul's use of athletic imagery would have resonated with his audience. In 1 Corinthians 9:24, he exhorts his flock to "run that you may obtain [the prize]." The context of this image clearly would have been the races that took place before the Corinthians' own eyes every two years during the games.

The Letter to the Corinthians and Its Relevance Today

When you page through Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, a lot of what you see is similar to what you read in modern-day news headlines: sex, promiscuity, scandals, debates and controversies, issues of the rich versus the poor, and lawsuits. Corinth was a newly established, fast-growing, and prosperous Roman colony and city with money continually flowing in and out of the community. But alongside such prosperity was widespread poverty. You will read about people "puffed up" with their own self-importance and pride in their knowledge and power, as well as about those who were marginalized.

Most of the Corinthians Paul was writing to were Gentiles who had just become Christians. Their former life was a very pagan one. Thus, a key question for them was one that we face today: "How do I live this new way of life in Christ in the midst of a pagan culture?" In responding to this question, there were two temptations for the early Christians. One was to withdraw, or isolate themselves, from the culture and from the wider society altogether because "It's all pagan. It's all bad." The opposite temptation was to keep a foot in both camps—to practice their newfound Christian Faith while continuing old, familiar pagan practices, thinking, "Why can't I be a Christian and still go to the temples and participate in familiar pagan customs? Does it really matter what I do if I 'know' the truth?" In addition to the question of isolation versus assimilation was the overarching question of charity. At the heart of the gospel is the call to charity: to love God with all your being and to love your neighbor as yourself. As will quickly become clear in this letter, the Corinthians were failing miserably in the call to live in charity, especially with their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Division, quarreling, sexual scandal, lawsuits, eating meat offered to idols, and errors in the way they practiced Christian worship and used the spiritual gifts were all issues Paul raised in the course of his letter. These issues come under two larger questions: "What is the authentic way to live the life of Christ in the midst of the world without being worldly?" and "How much am I willing to lay down my own life out of charity for others?" These questions are often at the heart of issues we deal with in our own lives today. That is what makes this letter so appealing and relevant. It has an immediate bearing on our own lives and our own experience.

Study Outline

Paul's letter to the Corinthians consists of sixteen chapters, which will be covered in the following sessions:

Session	Topic	Scripture Covered
One	Paul's Greeting to the Corinthians	1 Corinthians 1:1-9
Two	Division, Wisdom, and Pride in Corinth	1 Corinthians 1:10-3:4
Three	Servants of Christ and His Church Community	1 Corinthians 3:5-4:21
Four	Immorality – Assimilation Versus Isolation	1 Corinthians 5-7
Five	Eating Meat Offered to Idols Versus Love of Neighbor	1 Corinthians 8-9
Six	Imitating Israel in Corinth	1 Corinthians 10:1-11:1
Seven	True Worship	1 Corinthians 11:2-12:31
Eight	Love and Building Up the Church	1 Corinthians 13-14
Nine	Resurrection	1 Corinthians 15
Ten	Paul's Closing Words	1 Corinthians 16

For this study, we recommend *The Great Adventure Catholic Bible*, an RSV-2CE Bible that incorporates the same color-coded *Bible Timeline* Learning System that you will use throughout this program.

INTRODUCTION TALK NOTES

- I. Welcome to First Corinthians – The Church and the Christian Community**
- II. First Corinthians: Blueprint for Living Christian Life in a Pagan Culture**
 - A.** “Reading someone else’s mail”
 - B.** Need to understand historical backdrop
- III. Corinth in First Century AD**
 - A.** Figure of Gaius Julius Spartiaticus, Roman procurator
 - B.** Major commercial center – two seaports
 - C.** Population 150,000–250,000
 - D.** Julius Caesar “re-founds” city in 44 BC as a Roman colony
 - E.** City of great wealth
- IV. Paul**
 - A.** Born Saul in Tarsus, ethnically Jewish
 - B.** Roman citizen
 - C.** Spoke Greek
 - D.** Studied under the greatest rabbi in Jerusalem, Gamaliel
 - E.** Knew Greco-Roman and Jewish worlds
 - F.** Conversion on the road to Damascus
 - G.** Like his namesake, King Saul, he persecuted the LORD’s anointed
 - H.** Became a great evangelist for Christ
- V. Paul’s Evangelization Strategy**
 - A.** Enter a city announcing the *euangelion* (“Good News” or “gospel”)
 - B.** Jewish understanding of the “Good News” (Isaiah 40:9, 52:7)
 - 1.** Messenger will proclaim the restoration of God’s kingdom and the advent of the Messiah
 - C.** Roman idea of “Good News”
 - 1.** Birth of “divine” emperor Caesar Augustus = *euangelion*
 - 2.** Augustus as the savior of humanity
 - D.** Clash between Roman and Christian visions of “Good News”
 - E.** Occasion of Paul forming Christian community in Corinth
 - F.** Paul addresses how Christians should live in the midst of a pagan culture

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Session One

1 Corinthians 1:1-9: Paul's Greeting to the Corinthians

Gulf of Corinth

A. Establish the Context

Knowing the context is important for understanding the story. If possible, read through the entire letter of First Corinthians quickly before you begin this session to get a general idea of what you will be studying. Read the Introduction if you have not done so already.

In the Introduction, we learned that Paul first visited Corinth during his second missionary journey (see Acts 15:36–18:22), probably sometime in late AD 49. This would have been a few years after the Romans began rebuilding a new colony on the site of the city they had sacked in 146 BC. Paul stayed in Corinth almost two years with this young Christian flock which was made up primarily of Gentile converts. In preparation for studying Paul's letter to this young church, we will review the account of Paul's time in Corinth recounted in Acts 18:1-18.

Paul wrote this first letter to the Corinthians during his third missionary journey (see Acts 18:23–21:17) probably around the spring of AD 52. Paul stayed in Ephesus for more than two years on this missionary journey, and while he was there, he received word of divisions, quarreling, and immoral practices within the Corinthian community (see 1 Corinthians 1:11 and 5:1). In addition to these reports, the Corinthians wrote to Paul directly and asked for direction on a number of issues. Unable to travel immediately to Corinth to deal with these problems in person, Paul wrote this first letter to the Corinthians to help build up the struggling flock. In this session, we will look at Paul's greeting in 1 Corinthians 1:1-9.

B. Read the Story

Carefully read Acts 18:1-18 and 1 Corinthians 1:1-9. Ask yourself the questions *Who? What? When? Where? How? Why?*

As always, pray before you read.

C. Take a Deeper Look

Answering the following questions will draw you into the heart of the story. If you do not understand something, make a note of it to bring up in the discussion.

PAUL'S TIME IN CORINTH (ACTS 18:1-8)

1. When Paul arrives in Corinth, who are the first people he meets, and what is their trade? How long does Paul stay in Corinth?
2.
 - a. Aquila and Priscilla (or Prisca) become companions of Paul for the sake of the gospel. What else can we learn about them from other places in Scripture? Read 1 Corinthians 16:19; Romans 16:3-5; and Acts 18:26.
 - b. How are Priscilla and Aquila an example of the effect the Faith should have in our lives? (Read Acts 2:42 for a description of the life of faith of the early Christians.)
3. Read Jeremiah 1:7-8, 1:18-19; Acts 18:5-6, 18:9-10.
 - a. What kind of response to their messages do both Jeremiah and Paul encounter?
 - b. How are God's words to Paul reminiscent of his words to the prophet Jeremiah?

PAUL'S GREETING (1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-9)

Upon arriving in Corinth, Paul first turned his attention to the Jewish community, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the promised Messiah. However, the majority of the Jews in Corinth rejected Paul's message and opposed and reviled him. As a result, Paul turned his focus to the Gentiles in Corinth, and many who heard Paul were baptized.

“CALLED TO BE SAINTS”

Paul's opening greeting says that we are “called to be saints.” In Greek, “saints” is *hagioi*, or “holy.” God calls us to be “holy ones.” In the Old Testament, items or persons who were sanctified, or made holy, were set apart for the service of God. (For example, special vessels were made and set apart to be used only for worship in the Temple; likewise, the Levites were set apart from the other tribes for service at the Temple.) But even before the existence of the Temple, God instructed Moses to “say to all the congregation of the people of Israel, ‘You shall be holy [*hagioi*]; for I the LORD your God am holy [*hagioi*].’” (Leviticus 19:1-2). Thus, God's people, who have entered into his covenant, are called to be saints: holy ones set apart for God himself. How much more true is this for Christians, who in baptism receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and thus the power to live out this call to holiness?

4. a. The word “call” or “called” appears four times in the opening chapter of First Corinthians (three in this opening greeting). Find the four references, and fill in the chart below.

LOCATION IN FIRST CORINTHIANS	WHO IS CALLED?	WHO CALLS?	WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE CALL?
1:1			
1:2			
1:9			
1:24			

- b. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul writes, “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:1-3). How are the three “callings” Paul describes in his opening greeting to the Corinthians reflected in these verses from Ephesians?

- Paul's call to be an apostle:
- Christians' call to be saints:
- Christians' call into fellowship:

5. Paul opens his first letter to the Corinthians by infusing a traditional Greco-Roman style of writing with deeper Christian meaning. A traditional greeting would wish the recipients "good-being" (literally, *chaire*, "well-being" or "good health"). How does Paul change this traditional greeting in 1 Corinthians 1:3? What is Paul doing by making this change?
6. With what does Paul say God has enriched the Corinthian church?
7.
 - a. What are the Corinthians called into according to 1 Corinthians 1:9?
 - b. Who else are among those called to this fellowship? (See 1 Corinthians 1:2.) What does this teach us about the nature of the Church?
8. How many times is Jesus Christ mentioned by name in 1 Corinthians 1:1-9? Why do you think Paul uses this repetition in the opening of his letter?

D. Application

This exercise will help you apply one of the key themes of the session to your life. After meditating on it, respond to God with a brief written prayer if you choose.

Paul opens his letter to the Christians in Corinth by referring to Christians as those “called to be saints” (1 Corinthians 1:2). Holiness is not just for some but for all. The Second Vatican Council reiterated this when it wrote, “Everyone ... is called to holiness” (*Lumen Gentium* 39). In order that we might reach this holiness, or perfection, the council continues by reminding the faithful that “they must use their strength accordingly as they have received it, as a gift from Christ. They must follow in his footsteps and conform themselves to his image seeking the will of the Father in all things. They must devote themselves with all their being to the glory of God and the service of their neighbor” (*Lumen Gentium* 40).

Holiness does not happen by accident. While holiness is a grace from God, it also requires the “use of our strength” and devotion “with all of our being.” Take a moment to reflect on whether you give such effort to obtaining holiness. How can you increase your effort in response to God’s call to holiness?

Dear Lord ...

SESSION ONE TALK NOTES

1 Corinthians 1:1-9: Paul's Greeting to the Corinthians

I. Corinth in First Century AD

- A.** Height of the Roman Empire – *Pax Romana*
- B.** Emperor Caesar Augustus claimed divinity (“son of God”)
 - 1. He built temples to himself and his family throughout the empire
- C.** Backdrop of Greek culture
 - 1. A Greek city in the Roman Empire
 - 2. Greek philosophy and language
 - a. Greek – everyday language of the Empire, arts, intellectuals
 - b. Latin – official government language
- D.** Corinth – major urban city
 - 1. Center of arts and sports (Isthmian games)
 - 2. Commercial center
 - 3. The “Las Vegas” of the Roman Empire – lax morality
- E.** Paul visits Corinth during his second missionary journey (AD 49)
 - 1. Strategic center for the spread of the gospel
 - 2. Meets Priscilla and Aquila
 - 3. Jews have been expelled from Rome – controversy over *Chrestus* (i.e., Christ)
 - 4. Supports himself as a tentmaker

II. Introduction to First Corinthians

- A.** Begins with a greeting (1 Corinthians 1:1); mentions Sosthenes, a Corinthian convert
- B.** “To the Church of God which is at Corinth” (1 Corinthians 1:2)
- C.** Refers to Jesus as *Kurios* (“Lord”), subverts Roman emperor’s claim that he is Lord
 - 1. Hint of coming conflict with the Empire
- D.** “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:3)
 - 1. A typical Roman letter began with a reference to “health”
 - 2. Paul wishes them “grace” (Greek, *charis*) and “peace” (Greek, *eirene*; Hebrew, *shalom*)
- E.** Gives “thanks” (*eucharistia*) to God for his grace to Corinthians (1 Corinthians 1:4)
- F.** Waiting for the return of Christ, for judgment (1 Corinthians 1:8)
- G.** Paul reminds them that they are called to holiness

H. “You were called into the fellowship (*koinonia*) of [God's] son” (1 Corinthians 1:9)

- 1.** *Koinonia* – two contemporary meanings
 - a.** Business partnership
 - b.** Citizenship
- 2.** Christians are called into *koinonia* (fellowship) with Christ and his Church
 - a.** Christian life must be communal life
 - b.** Fellowship strengthens us against pagan culture

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