

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

Over the years, I've found my life changing and my faith deepening as I meet with our heavenly Father in His word. This has been especially true as I've been writing these devotionals and having to live what I write.

I long for you to be able to say the same as you read through 1 Corinthians with me.

As I've gotten to know Paul, James, Peter, Jude, and John through their letters, I'm overwhelmed by how they were changed by knowing and walking with their Lord. How much they must have longed for us to know Him as they did.

As John wrote in 1 John 2:3-6, he wants us to walk as Jesus did and believed that it was absolutely possible to do so. So how did Jesus walk? That's one secret our Father shares with us.

Blessings on your time as we take another walk with the Father,

Margie Martin

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Paul first traveled to Corinth after being in Athens. Soon after he arrived, he met Aquila and Priscilla, Jewish believers who had come from Rome when Claudius commanded all Jews to leave. He stayed with this couple for a while since they were fellow tentmakers. At first Paul reasoned with the Jews and Greeks in the synagogue on the Sabbath.

When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia to join him, Paul began devoting himself fulltime to preaching that Jesus was the Christ. The Jews' opposition to him became so abusive that he left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus to preach. Many Corinthians believed because of Paul's teaching, including a synagogue ruler and his entire household.

One night the Lord came to Paul in a vision, telling him to keep on preaching and not to be afraid. Soon after this, the Jews brought charges against Paul, and he was taken in front of Gallio, proconsul of Achaia. Gallio dismissed the charges. Paul stayed in Corinth for 18 months, teaching the Corinthians about Jesus Christ; then he left for Jerusalem by way of Ephesus. Aquila and Priscilla left with him and settled in Ephesus.

This letter to the Corinthians was probably written around A.D. 57 while Paul was staying in Ephesus during his third missionary journey.

For more background of what Paul encountered when he met the believers in Corinth, read Acts 18:1-17 about Paul's second missionary journey.



New Testament World

As you spend time in this letter, please take the time to talk with our Father about what He's showing you so you're not just gathering information. As you pray, you can use the space on each page to journal your thoughts or write Him a note.

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 1:1-3

“ . . . to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours . . . ”

What interesting words Paul uses in his greeting to these Corinthian believers: *sanctified*, *holy*, and *together*. Let's look at why they may have been important for them—and us.

Do you have a background of doing your own thing, living an immoral living, using others for your benefit, or choosing to profit from others' misfortunes instead of helping them? This description fits the Corinthian society. Does it describe you?

Perhaps this description doesn't ring true for you because you come from a more moralistic and legalistic background (*do this* and *don't do that*). If so, then Paul's letter to the Galatians will probably draw you in more. But I bet you will benefit from what you learn from the Corinthian believers' experience if not for yourself, then for those you live, worship, and work with. So let's look at these three words that Paul uses in his greeting:

Sanctified: The word means *put to its intended purpose*. For example, we sanctify a chair by sitting on it. We are sanctified when we live the quality of life God intends for us—not the life we may want to live or what the society around us dictates.

Holy: set aside, whole, complete, not divided, reflecting God's character

Together: not being on our own; involved with others; mentally and actually connected with other believers where we live, around the world, and for all times; not Lone Ranger Christians; not isolated

Because of the lack of morality in the Corinthian society, I can easily understand why Paul included the first two words, but why *together*? Here's one idea: those who pursue pleasure and external appearances really care only about themselves. Their concern goes only as far as how the other person can add value to their lives. So the challenge to them to be part of a group that is larger than their own social background would be immense.

Which of these three words challenges you? Are you living the way God wants you to? Is your moral character based on those you're around? Do you agree with some of what God calls you to but primarily live to satisfy your own desires? Do you celebrate your individuality, or do you pursue life with other believers of all types and ages?

Isn't it amazing that God knew what exactly these believers in Corinth needed to hear, and what we need to hear? Are you listening?

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1 Corinthians 1:4-9

You x 11

Did you notice all the *you's* and *yours* as you read? Of the 101 words in this section, 11 of them refer specifically to the Corinthians, and only 1 is an *I* that refers to Paul. This observation challenges me, because when I write a letter or speak to others, I use so many more *I's* than *you's*. You too? So, since Paul is so other-oriented, let's look at what he has to say to his readers:

- They have God's grace in Christ Jesus.
- They have been enriched in every way in Him—especially in their speaking and knowledge.
- Their lives confirmed Paul's testimony about Christ.
- They have every spiritual gift.
- They eagerly wait for their Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.
- They will be kept strong to the end by Him.
- They will be blameless on the day Jesus Christ returns.
- They are called by God into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ, their Lord.
- They know God is faithful.

This passage is one of those good-but-hard-ones for me to read. I've been realizing that while I can care about others when they're around, when I'm by myself or busy doing what I think is important, others' deep concerns aren't even on my radar screen. And, while praying for others is on the top of my wish-to-do list, it ends up being at the bottom of my "done" list. Can you identify?

I could rationalize and say I'm this way because I know God is working in their lives and I trust Him. But mainly I'm this way because I tend to concentrate on *what's* in front of me. I'd rather be someone who has others on my heart as I talk with the Father. Can you identify?

My personal hope is that since God could take Paul from being an accomplishment-driven person to a man who saw that loving people was the best way to accomplish what God had given him to do, He can do the same for me—and you?

The Christian life is a balance of seeing ourselves and others from God's point of view, doing what He puts in front of us, and being other-minded as we see them through God's eyes.

Are you in balance? Is God putting His holy finger on one of these areas for you today? What are you going to do about it?

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

“Christ [sent me] to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.”

How quickly Paul tackled a major problem in the Corinthian church: pride that resulted in divisions among them. Did you notice how he approached the issue? In the greeting, he reminded the believers of their identity. In yesterday’s section, he reminded them of all that God had done for them. Today he identified the issue, stated how he knew about it, and gave them specific examples of how they were living out the conflict. Then he gave his opinion of what they were doing and how it negated (denied) the work Jesus did on the cross.

How do you think his readers responded to his logic? I bet they were saying a lot of *yeah but’s*. Isn’t that what we do when someone confronts us with what we’re doing wrong? We rationalize, explain away, and blame others. We use human wisdom that’s based on pride and self-sufficiency. But Paul’s last point stops us all in our tracks: are our choices honoring or devaluing what Jesus Christ did on the cross?

Need an example? Last week we were having dinner with friends who know about our city’s politics. Conflict among the council members was being broadcasted all over the state, and I wanted to know what was really going on. Instead of asking for information with a caring and humble heart, I tried to be cute and ask for “the dirt on the council.” One of the women who had been reading my first devotional challenged me by what I had written from Ephesians 4:29. Because my heart was full of myself and not Christ, I brushed off her comment instead of humbling myself and agreeing with the truth. I emptied the cross of its power.

Needless to say I can now see the situation and myself clearly, and I’ve had to own up to what I had said to her and thank her for her honesty. The last thing I want to do is not live what I write.

How about you? What kind of wisdom do you express? Do your choices reflect pride or humility? Do your choices of words and actions bring honor to Jesus Christ from those around you or rob the cross of its power?

If you don’t like your answers to these questions, what steps can you start taking based on today’s ideas?

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1 Corinthians 1:18-31

“It is because of [God] that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.”

Have you ever thought about wisdom’s value, source, how it’s achieved, and what it does? We often say that wisdom comes with age and experience, but I think we need to throw humility into the mix. The human wisdom Paul has been talking about doesn’t even come close to the wisdom that comes from knowing God.

In yesterday’s section, Paul referred to the divisions among the believers (whose teaching they followed, who baptized them), issues that revolved around human behavior.

What divisions are in today’s churches? What could you add to this list?

- Seeker church vs. training the saints to reach others and having fellowship with each other
- Contemporary vs. traditional service (which was contemporary when it started)
- Dunking vs. sprinkling for baptism
- Spirit-filled vs. reformed
- Casual-style dress vs. suits and ties at Sunday services
- Praise songs vs. hymns

How do you think human wisdom would respond to these differences in opinion? How do you think those who have God’s wisdom would respond?

From Paul’s insight, I think that while believers who live by God’s wisdom have their own preferences, they wouldn’t turn these preferences into divisive issues. Instead, these mature believers know that what God wants is hearts that honor Him. The Father wants righteousness, holiness, and redemption to be hallmarks of His children’s lives, not standards of this world that aren’t important in view of eternity. He wants us to boast in the cross, not in ourselves, and He wants us to want what He wants.

Look honestly at your relationships with others and how you talk about believers who aren’t in your circle. Do the words *harmony* and *unity* describe you? If your answer is yes, halleluiah! If it isn’t, then please join me at the foot of the cross.

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1 Corinthians 2:1-5

“ . . . so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.”

Have you taken time recently to think about what your faith *rests on*? Recently in a study I’m doing with some women, two of our questions were:

1. How well do you function if you don’t get to be around those people who help keep you strong spiritually?
2. If you have great teaching at your church and you don’t get to go for a few weeks, what happens to your walk with the Lord?

I think most of us would agree that we do better spiritually if we regularly get to hear good teaching and be around authentic Christians. After all, God did think up the ideas of relationships and spiritual gifts for the well being of all believers.

But what if we start to depend on others so much that our faith comes from *their* teaching, knowledge, and wisdom? And what happens if we keep listening to truth but don’t put it into practice, if we don’t respond to what we hear? I think we all know the answer, but do you know why?

Paul says that living this way is like drinking milk instead of eating meat (see the next chapter). A milk diet is great for babies, but it’s not meant for adults.

One of the characteristics of God that’s been coming to my mind this last year is that our Father is a jealous God. He wants our full trust, dependence, and allegiance. If we try to put anyone or anything on His pedestal, He won’t let it stay there because it will lead us astray and derail us from walking with Him. He wants the best for us, and only He knows what *the best* is since He isn’t limited by time or space.

God’s power gives credibility to His words. That’s one reason why Jesus did so many miracles when He was here on earth.

So what is your faith resting on these days? Are you depending on a teacher’s words, a friend’s wisdom, or an emotional experience? They will let you down, no matter how good they are. God wants your faith and your confidence to rest solely on Him and what He’s able to do.

Is this what you want too?

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1 Corinthians 2:6-16

“No, we speak of God’s secret wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began . . . but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.”

I think we all want to be wise and have others value and seek out our input. But if we’re really honest, we’d probably admit that this desire is selfish since we want to be in charge and to look like we have life under control. But I wonder if this desire to be wise is part of how we were created since it is part of God’s nature and we’ve been made in His image. Let’s look at what we can learn about *God’s wisdom* from this section:

- It has been hidden.
- He destined it for our glory before time began.
- Knowledge of it would have stopped the rulers of the age from crucifying the Lord of glory.
- We can’t see it, hear it, or conceive of it on our own.
- God prepared it for those who love Him.
- He has revealed it to us by His Spirit.
- We can know His thoughts through His Spirit.
- It allows us to understand what God has freely given us.
- The Spirit teaches us to express spiritual truth (wisdom) in spiritual words.
- Without the Spirit, God’s wisdom seems like foolishness and can’t be understood.
- It allows us to evaluate all things.
- It isn’t subject to the world’s evaluation or judgment.
- It frees us to be taught by the Lord.
- By it we can know how Christ thinks.

What an amazing gift we’ve been given through the Spirit. We can know the mind of Christ: how He thinks, what’s important to Him, and how He operates. God so loves us that He *wants* us to know His wisdom—not for our own sake or self-importance, but so we can join Him in what He’s doing.

As you’ve probably discovered, the world thinks we’re foolish, silly, simple, and out of touch when we don’t depend on ourselves and our abilities. God’s standards and values are considered old fashioned and out of date.

Are you willing to live contrary to your culture? Living God’s way requires a humble heart and a teachable spirit. You may not “feel” humble and teachable, but how about asking the Teacher to teach you? Asking is the first step.

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1 Corinthians 3:1-4

"I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you still are not ready. You are still worldly."

I'm always amazed at how Paul and Jesus were able to take everyday aspects of life and express spiritual truths through them: in this case, babies' milk and solid food.

When Barney and I got married, he already had three sons entering adolescence, so we decided to wait for grandchildren instead of having our own kids. God has graciously allowed me to be the local grandma for three of my four grandchildren. Over the years, I've made some observations about babies' eating habits that relate to Paul's comments. I bet you can add to the list, especially since these observations describe our own spiritual lives.

- Milk is food the mother has eaten, digested, and given to her baby in the form in which it can be received most easily.
- Milk is what helps the baby grow and what protects the baby against diseases.
- Milk has to be given and received regularly, like clockwork.
- Without milk, a baby becomes cranky, out of sorts, and weak.
- As a baby grows, he can sit up on his own and wants to eat what those around him are eating, but his mom knows what food he can digest best and so provides him with a balanced diet.
- As a toddler's teeth come in, he can eat food that is firmer and chewier.
- As a child's tastes develop, and he knows what he likes to eat, his mom will still oversee what he actually eats.
- Eventually a child grows up and can fix his own meals, choosing what and when he'll eat.

But what if a teenager wants to only drink milk? All of us would think that something was terribly wrong.

That's what was happening to these Corinthian believers. They knew about God's love for them and that Jesus died on the cross for their sins, but this truth hadn't changed their thinking or their behavior. They were still giving into jealousy and so were quarreling with each other over who was their favorite leader.

Do you see yourself in their picture? Are you taking truth seriously and letting Jesus change you, or are you staying worldly and ignoring what God wants by comparing yourself with others or quarrelling with them? Is it time to put away the bottle and begin eating real food?

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1 Corinthians 3:5-23

“But each one should be careful how he builds.”

As I look at this verse, three lines of thinking are swirling around in my head that I think God wants to bring together.

1. The overwhelming theme I've seen in the last few chapters in Romans and these early chapters in 1 Corinthians is the need for humility: not assuming that *I* have the answer or the wisdom needed for life.
2. At church this morning, our pastor emphasized the principle that we need to honestly look at *why* we do what we do rather than come up with rationalizations that no one else believes anyway.
3. I've been finding myself being more and more aggravated by a few people around me who always have the right answer for everyone else's issues.

As I was leaving church this morning, I asked my husband why I was always frustrated with a certain individual. As soon as I said the words I saw myself doing exactly the same thing that I'd been silently complaining about others doing for the past 30+ years of my Christian life. I felt like I'd been hit in the stomach because of my pride, arrogance, and know-it-all-ness. If Jesus is my foundation, humility has not been the walls of my building. Can you identify?

Perhaps your issue has been an unwillingness to think about or own up to the real issues going on in your heart. If so, Jesus hasn't even received an invitation to remodel what you've built.

If *pride* (looking at ourselves too much by either puffing ourselves up or putting ourselves down) or *superficiality* (dealing with surface excuses rather than the real issues) are our building supplies, they are like wood, hay, or straw; and they won't last when (not if) the storms come.

But if humility, honesty, and depending on Jesus (rather than on others' opinions and examples) are our building supplies, they will be as valuable as gold, silver, and costly stones and will produce a building that will endure through storms and over time and will be one in which God delights to live.

What does your building look like?

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1 Corinthians 4:1-21

"[The Lord] *will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's [and women's] hearts.*"

If you weren't challenged to be honest with God after yesterday's devotional, I bet today's verse struck you, especially when we add Paul's intensity to his words. After seeing a logical, systematic, calm writer in his letter to the Romans, this letter shows an entirely different side of him. But if you've been a parent of a wayward adolescent, I'm sure you're able to understand Paul's anger, shame, sorrow, and indignation over the choices the Corinthians have made.

Scripture tells us that the Lord *will* return at an appointed time and evaluate (judge) our hidden actions and secret motives. If we haven't dealt honestly and thoroughly with these actions and their motives when we're aware of them, this judgment time won't be pleasant.

So why is Paul saying these hard-to-hear words to the Corinthians (and us)? I think he's challenging them to be honest and change their minds about what they're choosing to do and actually doing. He's challenging them to turn 180° and walk in the opposite direction. So what is he saying?

- Be willing to be foolish in the world's eyes so people can experience God's wisdom that comes through our humility.
- Admit weaknesses rather than ignoring or rationalizing them.
- Work hard instead of being lazy.
- When cursed, bless the person.
- When persecuted, endure the attacks.
- When slandered, answer kindly.
- Be willing to be thought of as nothing by the world so God can bring honor.
- Be known for living by God's power (changed life) rather than having a life of talk without action to support our words.

Which of these statements challenge you? I think Paul is telling us that if we keep short accounts with God, quickly confessing those motives, thoughts, and actions that He's told us to avoid and *then* walk in a new direction, our final evaluation time with Him will be amazing! At that moment we'll be able to see—with Him—all that He was able to do through us as we walked by faith.

What type of review time do you want: short and painful or long and rewarding? Are you walking with God now in your thought life and how you process decisions so you can have the review you want? If not, what needs to happen now so you can start walking in the other direction and love that final review time?

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 5:1-13

“... hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved in the day of the Lord [when Jesus Christ returns to earth].”

Are you surprised, or even shocked, by Paul's words about the believers who indulged in sexual immorality and about those who accepted this behavior? In our generation of tolerance and acceptance, his words sound harsh, don't they? But remember, Paul also says that this man (and woman), as well as some in the church, were *flaunting* this relationship. They weren't *struggling* over what they were doing; it was an in-your-face situation. These believers knew better. They weren't confused or untaught. And they were being held up as examples to follow.

So why would Paul think that it was important for them to be removed from fellowship? When they were among the other believers, they were being loved, accepted, valued, and included in activities. By being outside of the Christian fellowship, however, they would be forced to live life without God's loving involvement in their lives.

Outside of the love and support of the believers (the church), they wouldn't be under the umbrella of God's protection or have access to God's family. They would be in the world ruled by Satan without any buffers. Hopefully, this contrast between *what is* and *what could be* would wake them up to what they could have.

In a setting where people do whatever they want whenever they want, we can clearly see the consequences of their choices. Paul says that experiencing life without God will destroy their *desire* to indulge in their sinful nature and what will remain will be their spirit, which *wants* to please God.

So, what does this sobering information have to do with us? I think it means we have to take seriously our *desire* to sin and not give in to it. I think it means we need to encourage each other to *righteousness* (right living coming out of a right standing), *sincerity* (nothing hidden) and *truth* (no lies being played with). I think it's because none of us wants to be in the position of this couple. I've seen church discipline like this practiced in a healthy and redemptive way, and restoration happened.

Are you playing around with sexual immorality, boasting, malice, or wickedness of *any* kind? Are you starting to experience the results of such behavior? Wouldn't you rather experience the quality of life God wants for you? I know God would rather see His children's faces than the backs of their heads.

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 6:1-6

“Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases?”

What a strange concept Paul is recommending: having a fellow believer (or group of believers) mediate a dispute between believers. In a society full of lawsuits where strangers can know about all of the details of our personal and financial lives, the prevailing attitude is that we don't want anyone in the church to know anything or have any involvement in our personal or business affairs. It's so easy to hang on to the admonition of not judging anyone that we reject (or ignore?) Paul's words in this section.

A huge difference exists between judging that comes with criticalness and condemnation and judging that evaluates the facts and renders a redemptive decision. Jesus warns us about being critical, judgmental, and condemning toward others. Paul takes us further down that road by saying:

1. Know your identity: you're a saint, a redeemed person.
2. Depend on God's secret wisdom revealed by the Spirit when interacting with others, not on human wisdom,
3. Let humility rule in your heart, not selfishness or divisiveness.
4. Have a lifestyle that reflects God's power.
5. Be involved in what God has prepared for you.

If these characteristics already describe us, then if we're asked to mediate between believers:

- We'll want the best for everyone.
- We'll look at motives.
- We'll protect those who need to be protected.
- God will be honored.

Conflict is normal, and we shouldn't be surprised when it happens, but how we resolve it is critical.

Have you been asked to mediate in someone else's conflict? Or, are you having a dispute with someone else in the church? How are you going to resolve it? Ignoring the problem or gossiping about it isn't the solution, even though both responses are tempting.

Perhaps neither of these conflict situations faces you today. Then, are Paul's five characteristics true of you? If so, you'll be ready for whatever God brings along. If not, I guess you know where to start.

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 6:7-8

“Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?”

Two actions in American society that infuriate many are being wronged and being cheated. How do you respond when someone wrongs you or cheats you?

Recently some friends had a conflict with their insurance carrier over coverage for a hospital stay. No matter how often our friends called to resolve the problem, they were met by a brick wall of indifference and lack of caring. Finally they had to hire a lawyer who was able to talk sense with someone at the insurance company who would listen and make a fair decision. Other friends are being sued by fellow Christians whose hearts have been as hard and unyielding as the insurance service representatives.

Cheating other people and doing wrong to them (such as lying about them) are as prevalent in today’s world as they were in Paul’s. This behavior causes anger, divisiveness, and hostility. And if this behavior is being done by believers, then God’s kingdom can’t be furthered because believers aren’t judging themselves by God’s standards as they interact with others.

But Paul is saying that how we act in these situations is far more important than being right. He says that if we give in and respond the way the world does, we’ve already defeated as Christians. He says that if we give into the world’s way of responding, we’ll end up being the ones who cheat and do wrong—and we’ll perpetuate the problem. Finally, Paul reminds us that we’re in a family, we’re brothers and sisters, and a family should reflect its father.

When (not *if*) you’re being mistreated, does your response leave room for God to act through you? Does your response reflect God’s character and way of interacting or the world’s?

Isn’t it amazing how the need for humility touches all areas of our lives? Without humility we have to fight our own battles and stand up for ourselves. With humility we let God take responsibility for what is out of our control, and we are free to care for others.

In the long run, which way of living will produce what you long for in your old age? Do you want to be a cranky senior citizen or a peaceful, loving, humble, confident giver to the next generation?

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

“And that is what some of you were. But . . .”

What were you like before you became a Christian? Do you see yourself described in today’s section? When I’m being self-righteous, I speed read through these descriptions and don’t let the truth of where I was sink in. How about you? If you’re being truly honest, which of the descriptions on the left fit how you used to live? For how can we ever really know God’s grace unless we admit to where we’ve come from?

Then	Now
Sexually immoral, adulterers, prostitutes, homosexuals	Sexually pure lives; having a sexual life only when married; appearance, words, and actions that reflect the purity of Jesus
Idolaters	Worshiping only God—not a person, a job, or a status
Thieves, greedy	Not taking or wanting what another person has; being content
Drunkards	Not letting <i>anything</i> control us, not alcohol, drugs, challenges, desire for a “rush,” bad self-image, or anger; rather, letting the Spirit be in control
Slanderers	Looking for the best in others and talking about what you’ve found in them
Swindlers	Not taking advantage of a situation or a person; protecting others and their property

Be honest, now; describe how you were:



Was this honesty difficult for you? I know it was for me. But I’ve found that when God wants me to take a fresh look at what He’s done for me, I have to start with being honest and staying there for a while.

But that wonderful word *but* is in the verse we’re looking at, and we’ll look at the contrast tomorrow.

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

“And that is what some of you were. But . . .”

Now that you’ve lived with the reality of where you were, Paul’s word to us through the Corinthians is to live by the truth of what God has done in us through his Son, rather than dwell on where we’ve been. So what has God done?

He *washed* us

Though we were filthy because of our sins and our desire to live the way we wanted to, now we’re clean, inside and out, not through our own efforts (they can never be enough), but through Christ’s sacrifice and resurrected life.

He *sanctified* us

Are you sitting on a chair? Then you’re sanctifying that chair— you’re putting it to its intended purpose. God has a purpose for each of us, He has made us ready for this purpose by washing us, and He loves to work through us for the benefit of others and His kingdom.

He *justified* us

Do you often think about (obsess on) what you used to be like and how you thought that God couldn’t use you? Then you need to know that you’ve been justified— you’re *just as if you’ve never sinned*. Isn’t this incredible! If God doesn’t see you the way you were before you came to Him, why should you bring it up, and keep bringing it up, over and over?

So you were _____, and now you have been *washed, sanctified, and justified*. Which side of the *but* are you living on?

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

“You are not your own; you were bought at a price.”

At the church where I grew up spiritually, this sentence was engraved on the back wall of the platform: half was on one side of the pastor as he spoke and half was on his other side. So each Sunday as I saw these words, the truth of them burned its way into my head and heart. (Thank you, Lord!) But let’s look at Paul’s conclusions about this particular truth.

Corinthian Slogan	Paul’s Response
Everything is permissible for me	but not everything is beneficial
Everything is permissible for me	but I will not be mastered by anything
Food [is] for the stomach and the stomach [is] for food	but God will destroy them both (the desires of our earthly bodies aren’t needed in heaven)

Do you hear yourself in these following modern-day versions of the Corinthians’ slogans? I sure do.

I can do what I want. This won’t hurt me or anyone else. I’m free in Christ. My body belongs to me. Why not? It feels good. I want to. I need it. I need a distraction, a boost, some comfort, some company.

So, how do Paul’s responses in the chart strike you now? Perhaps you’re in a situation and you’re conflicted between these two ways of thinking: what from this section could help? I think the answer comes when we remember that when Jesus died because of taking on the sin of mankind—our sin—He didn’t stay dead. His sacrifice so thoroughly satisfied God’s anger toward sin that God raised Him from the dead. And if we’re in Christ, God allows us to experience Christ’s resurrected life in this world and will raise us to a new life in the next.

This resurrection hope sounds great, but if these earthly bodies aren’t our eternal homes, why do we cater to them so much? Shouldn’t we be living this new way of living, viewing our physical bodies as a temple—a place of worship and fellowship—in which the Holy Spirit (God Himself) can comfortably and honorably live? Of course we should, but the struggle is real and necessary as we live on this side of glory. How else will we learn to give up, choose to live life God’s way, and so walk by faith?

I’ve found that today’s truth is one I have to agree with daily (hourly?), and I bet you have too. *You’re not your own, you’ve been bought with a price.* Perhaps some circumstances in your life have come to mind where you need to live this truth. Hooray!

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 7:1-7

“Now for the matters you wrote about . . .”

With all of the problems that the Corinthians were having, I think today’s verse expresses hope for them: they recognized that they were having problems, and they asked Paul for his input.

Do you ever ask for input from someone you know who will give you God’s perspective? This asking shows a depth of humility and teachability that is so necessary if we’re to grow in faith.

Sexuality had so saturated the Corinthians’ culture that Paul’s teaching about purity and morality had challenged their belief systems to the extent that they didn’t know how to think or make decisions. They needed a set of standards to live by while they were getting used to walking with the Lord. If you’ve come from a lifestyle of doing whatever you wanted, you probably need these standards too, just as I did.

I’m sure you’ve felt the sexual hormones raging over the years, especially when you’re with someone you really like; in my era we called it the *urge to merge*. Today’s movies and TV shows don’t help us at all as women, especially, are encouraged to show off the very aspects of their bodies that can drive a man crazy with lust and as couples sleep together after just meeting.

A number of years ago Chuck Swindoll wrote a book entitled *Counter Culture Christians*. I’ve often remembered his premise that we’re to be counter to the culture we live in. Too many young Christians want to be counter to the Christian culture and in agreement with what’s around them. So the question we need to continually ask ourselves is, which culture are we being counter to in our appearance, words, and actions, even in how we dance?

God created us to be free, open, loving, learning, free of shame and pretense, and totally in love with Him. *Sin entered* the scene and turned everything upside down. *Jesus came* and died on the cross to give us a way back to God. But where are you in this process?

We all have to make some major decisions in life as to how we’re going to live, and one of the first decisions is who’s going to be in charge of our sex lives. But this isn’t a one-time decision, is it? It’s a decision we have to make daily, and at times hourly—whether we’re single or married.

If you’re struggling in this area (really in any area), my suggestion is to ask yourself this question: what kind of life do you want? Your answer will make all of your other choices clear.

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 7:8-9

“Now to the unmarried and the widows . . .”

As someone who was single until just before her 40th birthday, this chapter has been all too familiar. But as I've been reading it over and over to write this day's thoughts, some new ideas are coming to me. First, though, let's look at what we can observe from this section:

1. Paul acknowledges that hormonal surges are natural.
2. Paul understands that not everyone can control the urge.
3. Paul sees a value in being single that eludes most of us.
4. Paul states that marriage is to be the only outlet for sexual tension (although regular exercise can help).
5. Paul knows that burning with passion is an unhealthy way to live because it distracts us from what's important.

In our day (as in Paul's), if a man or woman isn't married and burns with passion, the result is usually frustration, an affair, or a one-night stand. So if you're single and identifying with the truth in this section, what are you to do? Paul says to marry, but what if a potential spouse isn't on the horizon? Here are some ideas you might want to consider:

Men: Learn what it means to be a good husband and marriage partner. Have as your goal that others will feel loved by just being around you. Find a man and his wife who have a good marriage, and ask them to help you get ready for marriage. Only Jesus knows how to make good husbands, and they don't happen overnight.

Women: Learn how to create and keep a home, and give yourself to it—the discipline is good for our characters. Develop nurturing skills. Ask for input from others, and learn from what they tell you so you'll practice asking and learning from your husband. Ask for help from a married couple who has the quality of marriage that pleases God. Only Jesus knows how to make good wives, and they don't happen overnight.

Men and Women: Meanwhile, pursue knowing and following Jesus. Be in the Word. Give of yourself to the next generation in your church home. When you see an attractive person of the opposite sex, thank God for what He's created, and ask Him to bless that person. Don't run away from conflicts with others, but work through them with grace and honesty. Keep yourself sexually pure so you'll have a wonderful wedding night gift to give to your spouse.

Will any of these suggestions be easy to do? Of course not—maturity doesn't come easily or quickly. But do you want the alternative?

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 7:10-16

“God has called us to live in peace.”

Note: As you probably know, this isn't the only passage in Scripture that deals with marriage, divorce, and the possibility of remarriage, so we're not going to get into the issue of when divorce and then remarriage are allowable. Also, while these paragraphs don't specifically address abuse in a marriage, I pray they will help a man or a woman who is in this type of situation. If you are in an abusive situation, get help now!

* * * * *

In first century Rome, men and women could easily and quickly dissolve a marriage and start a new one. The questions the Corinthian believers had (7:1) went something like this: “Can we remarry the way everyone else around us does?” “If my spouse doesn't become a believer, can I leave, marry someone who is a believer, and so have a Christian marriage?”

What Paul does in this section, I think, is elevate the Corinthians' view of marriage and stress the importance of the character and lifestyle of the believers who are married. Ready to see marriage through Paul's eyes?

1. Marriage is for life—one man and one woman for their lifetimes.
2. Marriage is a serious step to take.
3. God willingly works in a marriage in which only one person is a believer.
4. God takes care of the children in a marriage when only one person is a believer.
5. Because of the stress in marriage when only one person is a believer, marriage shouldn't *start out* this way.
6. Commitment to what God is doing is more important than our own personal happiness and satisfaction.
7. Instead of being agitated, restless, or argumentative, the believer is to *live in peace* in his or her marriage and choose not to aggravate the spouse.

Whether you're single or married, this section challenges us in so many ways, doesn't it? For example, would those close to us say we live in peace or that we're critical, demanding, and judgmental? Are we out for our own happiness and a comfortable lifestyle, or do we want to honor God in our relationships and give to others instead of demanding they change for our well being? Do we have wandering eyes, or do we choose to look only at our spouses (or at Jesus if single)? Do we want to be in control, or are we trusting our heavenly Father for today and for our future?

How would those close to you describe you? Are you willing to ask?

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 7:17-24

“Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord has assigned to him [her] and to which God has called him [her] . . . you were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.”

You may be wondering why we’re spending so much time in this section. Good question! First, it’s long. Second, Paul is looking at various lifestyles, and I want us to slow down and look at each one, discovering what the Father has for us. Third, this has been a confusing and unpopular section of Paul’s writing, and I want us to understand his heart and perspective. Now on to 1 Corinthians 7.

Where were you in life when Jesus called you to a relationship with Him and you responded? What city were you in? What company were you working for? Were you married or single? Did you stay in that environment and location for a while, or did you take off as quickly as possible for something new? If you’re in a different place, what would your life have looked like if you had stayed there? These are good questions to ask for those who became Christians as adults. If you became a Christian at an early age (lucky you!), you’ll probably want to look at where you were when Jesus called you to know Him as Lord and not just as Savior.

When I became a Christian in my mid-20s, I had already finished my education and was in the work world. Everything I was hearing about Jesus was new to me, and I was soaking it up. As I was re-evaluating every area of my life, a friend asked me if I wanted a career or a job that allowed, encouraged, and supported me as I volunteered in ministry situations. My choice—and this was a crossroads in my life—was to pursue work that allowed time and energy for ministry. I think this choice was a major reason why Jesus kept me single with Him for so many years: so we could establish the type of relationship I longed for. I thought it would be with a husband; Jesus knew it needed to be with Him.

I’m not saying that careers and marriage are bad—absolutely not! We need strong believers in every walk of life to reach those around them. But I think we also need to accept the truth that God doesn’t make mistakes in where He places us. He knows *what* and *who* we need so we can grow close to Him and with each other.

Are you learning and growing where you are? Whether you’re slave or free, single or married, young or old, busy or quiet—God longs to connect with you for your own sake and for the sake of those around you.

Ready to call where God placed you *good*—for everyone’s sake?

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 7:25-40

“... I have no command from the Lord; but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy.”

I’ve been reading these verses over and over the past few days, wondering what to write about and how to approach this section. We know that in this letter Paul is answering specific questions, so I’ve been trying to reconstruct these questions. Mainly, though, I’ve been trying to get my mind around *the thoughts he was thinking* as he answers the questions. I think he was trying to get the Corinthians to look at their lives in a whole new way. Let’s see if their challenges will challenge us as well.

Present Crisis: Could refer specifically to the growing pressure on the Christians from Nero. Could also refer to the crises that every decade and generation faces: economic, climatic, political, and lifestyle.
Conclusion: What crisis is our age facing?

Time is short: Could refer to the return of the Lord, which every generation has felt was coming soon, but probably refers to the length of our own lives since we have fewer days to live than we did five years ago.
Conclusion: How are we going to live out the rest of our days?

So, *what can we take from Paul’s words?* The pressure is on, and we don’t have forever.

What are we to do? Since we have all of eternity for *personal* fulfillment, let’s make the best use of the time we do have here on earth.

- *Singles:* Be involved with the Lord, and be devoted to Him in both body and spirit. Let God work in you through the stress.
- *Married:* Don’t let your spouse, children, or home take all of your attention. Keep these concerns and responsibilities in an eternal perspective, and let God work through them in your life.
- *Widows (and widowers):* While the desire for companionship may be strong, think about what you can offer the next generation from your experiences. Let God work through you for the benefit of others.

What Paul is giving us in this section is his personal judgment. Jesus never spoke directly about these topics—either while here on earth or in a revelation to Paul. But I can’t think of anyone else’s judgment I would take as seriously as Paul’s. With his changed life, intense study and knowledge of the Old Testament, and moral character, he is a man whose judgments are worthy of trust.

Are you looking at life with the same perspective as Paul?

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 8:1-3

“Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs us, but love builds up.”

Have you noticed that in Scripture when someone asks a question, God (through the human writer) puts the answer into a larger context and shares a bigger way of thinking before giving an answer, if indeed He ever gives a specific answer? In this section, the Corinthians have asked if they were allowed to eat food that had previously been sacrificed to the idols that permeated their culture. Before he answers their question, Paul addresses the heart issue that has prompted their question.

Do you have a question or an issue that you’ve been turning around in your mind and that has your stomach churning? I’m having one that’s slowly been forming in my mind and was starting to take me down into that slimy pit of depression. It’s easy for me to ignore issues and say I’m fine, which I’ve heard myself do three times in the past half hour and which disagrees with my internal thoughts and emotions. So as I sat down to write, I asked the Lord to give me what I needed—especially what I needed to know about Him and about the issues on my horizon. Are you with me? If not, you (or a friend) may be here tomorrow or next week.

In our short paragraph, Paul contrasts knowledge and love:

Knowledge	Love
Everyone has it; reflects us	Cares about others
Puffs us up if we rely on it	Builds up others
Fools us into thinking it’s all we need	Frees us to see ourselves realistically
Keeps us from knowing and being known by God	Lets us know and be known by God
Fools us into seeing ourselves as we want to be seen	Produces humility—we don’t know everything

One aspect of knowledge that I’ve been mulling over recently is that it is limited by time and space, which means that I can only know what has happened before a moment in time and in the physical areas I’m aware of. But God knows the future and what can and will happen in events and in people’s hearts. So if I depend on *knowledge*, I’m limiting myself and putting me in the center of my world. But if I give myself to God and His love, I have no limits. I’m free to love, give, build up, know, and be known.

Do you feel closed in today? Do you feel like walls are closing in or that your foundation is shaky? Then are you ready to give up, give in, and be set free to love?

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 8:4-6

“ . . . from . . . for . . . through . . . through ”

You probably slept through junior high or middle school grammar classes and haven't even thought about parts of speech since then unless you took a foreign language. I was the same way (even though I majored in English and took French) until I started teaching a business writing class for engineers. As I began looking at grammar and punctuation from their analytical and logical point of view instead of from the way it's normally taught (and rarely learned), I learned about the important role of *prepositions*, the part of speech for today's selected words.

Prepositions show **direction**: under a table, in the room; or **relationship**: between the brothers, among the team. So let's look at three *prepositions* Paul uses and what they tell us about the Godhead.

ONE GOD, THE FATHER, *from* whom all things come: All things come *from* a powerful and living God who wants to be thought of as Father. All things include people, nature, talents, time, space, love, hope, redemption, salvation, angels, free will, choices, consequences, you, and me. They are His ideas.

ONE GOD, THE FATHER, *for* whom we live: If all things come *from* God, then all things are dependent *on* Him, whether or not this dependence is acknowledged. If all things come *from* Him and are dependent on Him, then aren't all things obligated to live *for* Him, *for* what He wants, *for* what's important to Him? We have the choice of whether we live this way in our actions, words, thoughts, and responses to good and bad circumstances. If we choose to live for ourselves, then we also have to accept the consequences that come from our choices.

ONE LORD, JESUS CHRIST, *through* whom all things came: All things are *from* the Father, but we receive them *through* Jesus Christ. If Jesus hadn't died on the cross and taken on our sin natures, we would never have had access to His Father. It is only *through* Jesus that we know beauty, hope, love, peace, and changed lives. Thank you, Jesus!

ONE LORD, JESUS CHRIST, *through* whom we live: not only did Jesus' work on the cross make available a relationship with God as our Father, but when the Father accepted His sacrifice, He also raised Jesus to a newness of life that we have access to when we agree with Jesus that He's our Lord. We then have a new option for living: we can depend on Jesus' life in us *through* the Holy Spirit. In choosing to live *for* God, we can choose faith instead of fear or worry, love instead of criticalness (of others and ourselves), and hope instead of despair.

Which of these prepositions do you need today: *from*, *for*, or *through*?

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 8:7-13

“Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother [sister] to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him [her] to fall.”

Paul used the example of eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols—a huge issue in the Corinthian society—to illustrate how we can love others. But, before we get too far into applying this principle, let’s look at some important words.

Brother [sister]: a fellow believer. (For years the use of a masculine word in this context would assume that women were included. Today we need to make the inclusion more obvious.)

Weak brother, weak in conscience: Remember the sections we looked at in Romans 14 when Paul refers to weaker brothers? These believers are new in their faith, they haven’t learned the Scripture yet, and they haven’t worked through the basic issues of their faith. They’re impressionable and can easily follow the examples of those in leadership—for good or bad. They aren’t the mature believers who should know better but end up being critical and demanding certain standards for others to live up to without looking at their own attitudes and actions.

Exercise of their freedom: As we grow in Christ, we learn that we’re free to do anything that is not illegal, immoral, or unethical. But not *everything* we’re free to do is wise or beneficial for us, either personally or for those around us. So while we’re free to do, we’re also free not to do.

Fall into sin: Currently we’re involved at a church that purposely reaches out to those who aren’t in the faith yet and to those who are new to the faith. As believers further along the journey, we’re challenged to live lives that reflect what’s in Scripture and not just be molded by our society or traditional church lifestyles that are cultural rather than biblical.

Are you at a point in your Christian life that you’re an example to others? If someone were to imitate you, what would his or her attitudes, choices, words, and actions look like? Are you, and Jesus, happy with this picture? Are you willing to give up _____ for the sake of another’s walk with the Lord?

If you’re a new believer, what examples are you seeing? Do they line up with the Scriptural truths you’re learning? If your answer is *Yes*, hooray! If *No*, then remember that your best example is Jesus as He walked on earth. The kind of person He lived then is the kind of person He wants to be through us. Are you becoming that kind of believer?

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 9:1-15

“Don’t we have the right to . . . ? But we did not use this right.”

How did you do with yesterday’s section on *giving up rights*? It’s not a popular subject, is it? Perhaps some practical examples can help you prime your thinking? Here are some of Paul’s rights that he gave up for the sake of all believers:

- Housing and meals from those he’s serving
- Marriage and family life
- Respect
- Appreciation

Paul’s doing everything right, but he’s not getting what he knows he deserves. How hard this must have been for him. He gave and gave and gave, and he received, in essence, a slap in the face from the Corinthians.

Have you ever felt this way—with your spouse, kids, co-workers, company management, friends, small group members, church staff, or church family? Do you feel used and ignored? The apostle Paul—and Jesus Himself—lived with these responses, so we’re in good company.

Perhaps then, we should *expect* these responses instead of being surprised by them. Perhaps, instead, we should see these responses as an *opportunity* to share in the sufferings of Christ—what He went through for you and for me. Perhaps what’s important is not the pain we endure when we get these responses, but the prize that’s waiting for us: a reward and a thank you from our Lord. More on this tomorrow.

But what if you’re the one who isn’t *giving* the financial support, respect, and appreciation to those God has placed as leaders in your life? Is it time to be humble, appreciative, and giving rather than just receiving? Are you living lavishly while your pastor and his family are barely existing? Are finances tight for everyone in your community? Perhaps as you begin to give more—by faith—God will trust you with more resources.

No matter what financial situation you’re in, the issue is always your heart: is it closed up and hard or loving and reaching out?

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 9:15-27

“Don’t we have the right to . . . ? But I have not used any of these rights . . . that I may share in [the gospel’s] blessings.”

After looking at *rights* yesterday, have you been noticing any that you’ve been holding on to? Personally I’ve seen myself thinking I have the right to be angry, critical, and selfish when it comes to how I use my time. I could rationalize every one of my responses, but they all boil down to holding on to *my* rights.

Paul, however, gives us a different example to follow. Paul says that while he had rights in regard to his position as spiritual father to the Corinthians, he wasn’t going to exercise his rights. Why? Because the following reasons guided his choices, reasons that should help us as we face our own frustrating relationships and difficult situations:

1. Paul knew what he was saved from; he never wanted to go back to being that person, and he was grateful for what Jesus had done for him.
2. Paul was compelled to preach, teach, share, and live Jesus. The drive to do so was so strong that everything else paled in comparison.
3. When choosing between momentary self-indulgence and sharing in the blessings of the gospel, the answer for him was a no-brainer.

What about you? I bet you’re thinking of a situation in which you’re ready to set forth your case and demand a response that will make you happy. But what would happen if you didn’t demand your rights but chose instead to love, serve, and see life from the other person’s point of view?

In the light of eternity and with the joy of having God smile at your choices and then allowing you to share in His blessings, what choices do you want to make *today* concerning your rights? Dying to ourselves and to our emotions is hard to do, but what we get in return more than balances the scale?

I’m ready to give up—are you?

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

“Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as [the Israelites] did.”

As Paul talks about the Israelites' relationship as a nation with God, the words he uses are *forefathers, were all, they all, they were all*. We also have a “group” relationship with God: we are part of His Church, the body of Christ. Paul says that God was not pleased with most of the Israelites while they were wandering in the desert, because they individually and as a corporate body gave into the same temptations we're faced with:

1. *Idolatry*: valuing anything more than God
2. *Sexual immorality*: anything having to do with sex outside of marriage, including pornography, lust, and looking at those TV shows and magazines that we don't want kids to see
3. *Testing the Lord*: demanding that He do something in our timeframe to prove Himself; demanding could include saying that we just can't trust God unless He . . .
4. *Grumbling*: now this one hits home!

It's easy to think that God's responses to the Israelites' weaknesses were excessive. However, Paul says they happened for our sakes so we'll keep our hearts from everything evil. Paul would like for us to imitate his own example of not demanding his rights, and instead exercise self-control, which is a fruit of the Spirit. But if a positive example doesn't help, Paul gives us the alternative, telling us that God hates sin so much that He'll go to extreme measures to protect us: in this case, 23,000 Israelites died in one day because of sexual immorality, some were killed by snakes because of testing the Lord, and others were killed for grumbling.

Did you know that God hates sin this much? Did you also know that God loves us so much that He's given us examples of what would happen if we continue down a wrong path—and that even grumbling is going down the wrong path?

Which one of these temptations do you often face? Are you struggling with going in a direction you know is wrong? Tomorrow we'll see the hope that God gives us.

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

“Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as [the Israelites] did.”

So, which of these temptations do you struggle with the most?

1. *Idolatry*: valuing anything more than God
2. *Sexual immorality*: anything having to do with sex outside of marriage, including pornography, lust, and looking at those TV shows and magazines that we don't want kids to see
3. *Testing the Lord*: demanding that He do something in our timeframe to prove Himself; demanding could include saying that we just can't trust God unless He . . .
4. *Grumbling*: now this one hits home!

Our wonderful heavenly Father hasn't left us struggling with temptation all by ourselves. The truth in the last verse of this section is one we *have to* stand on or we have no hope:

- THE TEMPTATION YOU'RE FACING TODAY IS ONE WE ALL FACE— you *have not* been singled out, and you *are not* alone. Others can and do understand and have experienced *not* giving in.
- GOD IS FAITHFUL. He knows how much you can take, and He won't let temptation go any further than you can handle by depending on Christ's life in you.
- NO TEMPTATION IS SO POWERFUL THAT YOU HAVE TO GIVE INTO IT. A way out will always be available so you won't have to sin. Struggling isn't sin.

Are you struggling about going in a direction you know is wrong? Ask God to give you His eyes on the situation and your choices so you can see His way out. And then take it, no matter what your emotions are saying.

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 10:14-22

“Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.”

Were you as confused by this section as I was? In chapter 8, Paul talked about the Corinthians being able to eat food that had been sacrificed to idols as long as their consciences were clear. In today’s section he says “No!” to eating this meat. In tomorrow’s section, he is going to describe another situation when these believers could eat this meat. Is he confused or just giving mixed signals?

I did some reading and discovered that in this section he’s telling the people not to go to the temples where the meat was burned on the altars as sacrifices to the demons. So the meat itself was okay, but the activity behind it—which had previously been the Corinthians’ religious lifestyle—was a temptation they had to stay away from. Why? Because Paul understood the meaning behind the temple worship, and he knew that being involved in it in any way could suck them back into their old way of living. Therefore, Paul says to his dear friends, his brothers and sisters, *to flee* because he wants them to stay true to their devotion to God and their walk with Him.

What was your background before you became a follower of Jesus? Were you into the party scene? Then probably you should stay away from clubs. Were you into rock concerts? Then maybe you need to find other activities to do at night. Were you into sex? Then probably you shouldn’t date for a while. Were you into drugs? Then you need a new set of friends. Were you in a legalistic or strongly denominational, traditional church? Then a different style of church would probably be best for you.

You may be able to have a glass of wine occasionally if you used to drink a lot, or you may be able to listen to a CD of your favorite band from time to time if the rock concert lifestyle controlled you, but whatever lifestyle you lived before coming to Jesus has to be evaluated from the perspective of the cross. At times the best thing for us to do is *flee* from whatever we had been giving ourselves to. This change may result in a move, a new lifestyle, or certainly new friends to hang out with.

So you’re ready for changes but don’t know what to do next? The answer is, run to Jesus. Be involved in what and who He’s involved with. If you don’t, you’ll be arousing the Lord’s jealousy—not a good situation to be in because He longs for your heart to be fully His.

These changes are never easy, but no one ever said that following Jesus was easy. If He had to *die on a cross* to offer us a new way of living, wouldn’t it make sense that we have to die to our old ways of living too? What do you need to *flee* from, dear friend?

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1

“ . . . so that they may be saved.”

It's becoming obvious, isn't it, that Paul's concerned not just about our actions but also with our motives. His goal is for men and women to be saved, and he doesn't want anything to get in the way of this happening.

What a challenging question to ask ourselves: *will what I do or why I do it help or hinder another from knowing Jesus?* Are you at this level of thinking yet? It sure flies in the face of our selfishness, doesn't it? But let's look clearly at Paul's contrasts of how we tend to think:

This?	or This?
“everything is permissible”	“but not everything is beneficial”
“everything is permissible”	“but not everything is constructive”
Seek your own good	Seek the good of others
Eat, drink, and live for your own pleasures.	Eat, drink, and live for the glory of God
Don't worry about how actions affect others	Don't cause another to stumble
Seek your own good	Seek the good of others so they may be saved
Do what those around you are doing	Follow my (Paul's) example as I follow the example of Christ

Which side of the chart reflects how you think? If you're really honest with yourself, you probably play around with the left side: it's easy, comfortable, and fits in with how those around us are living. If that's where you are but don't want to stay there, these suggestions may help:

1. *Remember* what you've been saved from, where you were headed, and what you were like without Jesus.
2. *Thank* Him for what He did for you, and spend time looking at the cross.
3. *Sit* by the empty tomb for a while, remembering the power of the resurrected life He's made available for you.
4. *Evaluate* your thinking and actions based on this chart, and begin choosing to think and act differently.

As you make these changes, I know you'll find Jesus' resurrected power coming to life within you. What's your first step going to be?

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

“I praise you . . . for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you.”

I so appreciate Paul’s encouraging words as he begins this section. The Corinthians weren’t doing *everything* wrong; they just needed some course correction on a few important issues. How their asking for help must have encouraged him. How are you doing with the teaching that has been passed onto you? Are you holding on to it or just hearing and then letting it go?

This section is one of those that we must be careful with, or we’ll grab onto some cultural distinctions instead of seeing what God wants for us. In Corinth, most women wore a veil or scarf in public as a symbol of humility and submission. However, the temple prostitutes and courtesans flaunted their lifestyles by going bare-headed. In the new church, some of the women so loved their freedom in Christ that they threw away their head coverings, which gave the wrong impression to others. Also, some women didn’t respect others in the church when they prayed and prophesied—they just spoke out whenever they wanted to. What if these were the same women?

So here’s the question I want to explore from this section: *what does God want for His women?*

- Women are to have hearts and lifestyles of humility and respect.
- Women are to respect men, especially their husbands and the elders in the church. This respect frees men to reflect God’s character to the world. If a woman isn’t *being* the way God created her, the men around her have a very hard time being the men God wants them to be. Men and women are interdependent. Oh Eve, what you got us into!
- God is the one to be glorified, not women.
- Jesus, as He related to His Father while here on earth, is a woman’s best example of how to be submissive to and respectful of others. He thoroughly understands the role.
- Women submitting to God-given authority significantly impact the angels. How? I’m not sure, but they do.
- As women accept the leadership of their husbands, they show the world how freeing life is when a believer submits to God.

God’s teachings aren’t intuitive, and they really don’t make sense unless we know His heart.

Women, are you struggling with what you see in this section? If so, then scour the Scripture, and spend time with the Father so you can know, way down deep in your hearts, that God loves and values you.

Men, are you helping the women around you be submissive by loving them as God does? If so, you’ll be letting the world see how God loves.

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

“For I have received from the Lord what I also passed on to you.”

A couple of foundational thoughts have been swirling around in my head and heart that I'd like to share with you as we talk about how we are to live and act in God's family:

1. Paul's touches on issues in his letters that he had previously laid the groundwork for while living with the believers. Therefore, as we read what he says in each letter, we need to view it through the framework of *all* his writings.
2. It's easy to think that Paul's input is inferior to Peter's, John's, and James' since they had known Jesus personally. But as we can see from this passage (and others), the resurrected Jesus Christ personally spent time with Paul, teaching him by opening up the Old Testament with him. So Paul's teaching and exhortations have the weight of Jesus Himself speaking.

So what should we take from today's section? To me it's that I'm to "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" by dying to myself. I'd like to share with you how I think I need to practically live this truth. My biggest area of struggle comes when I feel like I'm being ignored, like I'm invisible to those around me. Over the last week, I could list for you ten times when I felt this way. With the most recent occurrence I overreacted because I hadn't been dealing with the previous occurrences as they happened and because I had expected more from this person. So I got on my high horse and blamed others for my responses, making *my* opinions the standard for others' behaviors. Do you do this?

A truth from yesterday's section that hasn't let go of me is that my lack of a submissive and respectful attitude reflects negatively on my husband. (11:5) However, my role in marriage is to show the world how Jesus responded to His Father and how the church (believers) is to respond to Jesus. (Ephesians 5) No wonder I've been "off."

- *Women*, how does submission resonate with you? If you struggle with it, please take some time to look at the relationship between Jesus when He was here on earth and His Father.
- *Men*, are you dying to yourself so you can reflect Jesus to those around you?

This challenge for men and women, whether married or single, shows why we always need to be "proclaiming the Lord's death until He comes" in words and deeds. Dying to ourselves is the only way to have the relationship with God that He longs for. Need to do some dying today?

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

“All these [gifts given by the Spirit] are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.”

Do you like to give gifts? Since our own children are grown, we no longer have to give necessities as gifts; we're able to give gifts that will delight those we love. So it must be with the Spirit—the third person of the Trinity. I bet that every time someone becomes a follower of Jesus, the three of them confer and decide how to enable this new believer to fit in to the body of Christ and benefit other believers so all will work together for the sake of the kingdom. And so:

- The Spirit determines *which gifts* each believer will have.
- The Lord Jesus determines the *areas of service* in which each is to be involved.
- The Father determines the *results (outcomes)* of these gifts.

Have you figured out which gifts you've been given, where you are to be exercising them, and how to leave the results with the Father? Peter refers to speaking and serving gifts (1 Peter 4:7-11). Paul in Romans 12 and Ephesians 4 adds some more gifts to the list. I've made some observations over the years that might help as you use your gifts:

- We don't get to choose the *what, when, how, or how long* of spiritual gifts.
- Spiritual gifts are for the good of others, not for us.
- Spiritual gifts are to glorify Jesus.
- Spiritual gifts may or may not pair up with our talents, abilities, and interests.
- Using our gift well requires a character that reflects Jesus.
- Whatever gifts we have, part of our responsibility is to teach other believers how to be more this way (character growth). For example, we learn how to be merciful by watching and imitating those who have the gift of mercy; we learn how to share our faith from evangelists. So look for those gifts that will balance you out.

How do you feel burdened to love others? This way of loving probably reflects your spiritual gift.

Who do you feel burdened to love? This is probably your area of service.

Not seeing any *results*? If you're walking by faith, dealing with hurtful attitudes and actions as they appear, and spending time with God in His Word, then He's in charge of the results in others, and you have another opportunity to walk by faith and not by sight.

How is the Spirit loving *through* you these days?

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

“For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body . . . and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”

Many of us would like to operate as Lone Ranger Christians—off doing our own thing in our own comfortable way—but God has another way for expressing Himself to His world. In the Old Testament we see God revealing Himself to and through one nation, Israel. In the Gospels, we see Jesus traveling with and revealing Himself to the twelve disciples and the group that traveled with them. When Jesus returned to the heavens, the Spirit came to a group of believers, forming them into Christ’s body on earth, the church. So while God loves us and knows us individually, He also places us in group environments so we can collectively picture Him to the world around us as we have to deal with (interact with) each other.

How do you do with this group mentality? Do you willingly learn from and with others, or do you isolate yourself from others’ involvement and input and want to be a mouth instead of an ear? It’s so easy to think that *our* way of loving and *our* giftedness is the best and most important. I remember going to a Christian doctor for a consultation. His gift was evangelism, and he started telling me about the difference Jesus could make in my life without even finding out where I was spiritually. I hate to think of the times I’ve shared truth with someone when what they really needed was for me to listen with my heart.

For years, I was involved with a junior high ministry. The volunteer staff studied the passages on spiritual gifts and then took a test to see which gifts were represented among us. Of the dozen or so in this group, eight had mercy as their first or second gift—and what do junior high students need in abundance? Mercy! No mistake that God had put us together for His kingdom work in the lives of these students. And the rest of us learned how to be more merciful as we watched our friends and imitated how they interacted with the students. So, what conclusions have you made from this section? Here are mine:

- God doesn’t want us to be like anyone else, so we shouldn’t try to be.
- God wants us to appreciate and learn from each other’s differences.
- God wants us to know the part in the body He has for us and then responsibly and humbly accept this role.

Here are some questions to consider: Do you know where you fit in yet, and are you willing to accept that role? What areas are you weak in? Who around you has gifts you could learn from? Are you willing to learn?

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

“ . . . but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal . . . I am nothing . . . I gain nothing.”

Our pastor often talks about defining moments that shape our lives. One of mine came from this chapter in 1 Corinthians that still speaks volumes to me.

I had been a Christian for a while, learning the Scripture, and involved in ministry. While I had a full-time job, I had decided that work would support my ministry rather than pursuing a career. At our church, we had a two-year study program designed to prepare men and women for ministry: two years of Greek, two years of Hebrew, one year of Bible interpretation, various other classes, and ministry involvement. I applied for the program and was accepted. I gave notice at work and was ready to study!

A month before beginning the program, I read this section, and my heart was pierced. My strengths are in academics, the strength that the study program required. However, at that moment I realized that I needed help with loving people; I needed a program with less study and more emphasis on ministry. So I dropped out of the program, had no job to depend on, and wondered what God had in store for me.

What the Father had prepared was an internship that He designed specifically: it had academic training that was suited to what I wanted to learn, but it also had more time to be involved with women who longed to grow spiritually. In addition, He gave me a part-time job tutoring in a writing lab (perfect for my educational background), and all of my support promised within two weeks of sending out a letter (amazing!). Did God want me to learn how to love people as I got to know Him better? You bet.

Do you find yourself able to (or longing to) speak eloquently and fluently? Do you pride yourself on your knowledge and practical experience? Are you known for a lifestyle of service and self-sacrifice? But are you also known for your sacrificial love for others?

Perhaps you think of yourself as a loving person, but after reading this section, you've realized that your love is emotional and rather saccharine (too sweet). Perhaps now is the time to put childish ways behind you and become an adult in the faith by how you love others.

Yesterday I read through this section with a young man who is facing the return of his cancer. His three children are under five. What a challenge this passage was for him and for me as I watched him. Would he learn how to love others through what was ahead of him, or would he rail against his circumstances?

How is this passage challenging you?

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 14:1-25

“Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.”

Have you noticed that believers in the first century wanted spiritual gifts that gave them pleasure and personal spiritual growth rather than wanting others to benefit from them using their gifts? They didn't realize how their selfishness and desire for autonomy affected the rest of the believers. Sound familiar?

As I've been reading through these passages on life in the body of Christ, and looking at the *each others* and *one anothers* in the New Testament, I'm coming to the conclusion that all too often we're far from what God had in mind for us as His church. (If you want to look at the *each others* and *one anothers* in the New Testament, go to our website, www.WalksWithTheFather.com, and download the PDF files.)

So what keeps us from being the church that God designed us to be and what Jesus died for? I think it boils down to pride, selfishness, not spending time with the Father in His Word, and not remembering where we've come from, especially in the area of spiritual gifts.

I think my spiritual gift is wisdom—the ability to practically put truth into practice. From this current look at the gifts, I've noticed that wisdom isn't knowledge and understanding for my sake, but it's an ability to look at life from God's perspective that results in a practical life change. The gift I've been entrusted with is for the benefit of others. For others to benefit, however, they need to *want* to hear truth and put it into practice. My job is to listen to how I share so others can easily receive truth, just as evangelists and preachers need to listen to how they speak and avoid putting up unnecessary barriers.

Have you discovered which gifts you've been given and how these gifts can build up (edify) those around, like building a house? If so, I know this sweet taste of being used by God has left you longing for more.

Have you realized yet that those around you (yes, right now) are either part of the body of Christ or potential members of the body? How are you learning from others who have gifts that you need? Are pride and selfishness characteristic of you, or are others strengthened, encouraged, and comforted by being in your presence? Others benefiting from being around us for the sake of the kingdom happens when we're other-oriented and depending on Jesus' life within us.

Who's benefiting from what you say and do?

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 14:26-40

“When you come together . . . all of these [use of gifts in corporate worship] must be done for the strengthening of the church . . . for God is not a God of disorder but of peace . . . but everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.”

“When you come together.” What a *family* way of describing corporate worship. For Paul to have to lay down these instructions, the Corinthian church must have been an unruly group of believers: everyone talking loudly at the same time (and in different languages that no one else could understand), no one listening to another, no discernment or discussion of what was being said, and women saying, “I don’t understand!” in the middle of the service just to have their voices heard. Confusion reigned, and the volume rose as men and women spoke over each other.

Seems like what this group of believers needed was personal maturity and humility. They needed to care about each other and live in a way that honored God because of what He’d done for them.

What are you like when you come together with other believers, whether in a large corporate setting, in a smaller community group, or when you’re meeting with one other person?

Does your coming together STRENGTHEN each other?

Is PEACE the prevailing atmosphere?

Do your times together REFLECT God’s character?

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 15:12-34

“Now if there is no resurrection . . . why do we endanger ourselves every hour? . . . If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’”

I’m so grateful that we get to look at Jesus’ resurrection today because of what’s happening around me. First, I’ve been in a study on Jesus, and we just finished looking at His death and resurrection at the end of each Gospel. Second, a young man at our office (early 30s) has just found out that his cancer has returned in his bones, and he’s now at level 4. Third, I spoke with a friend earlier today who’s facing a possible move out of state because of her husband’s work, and she doesn’t want to move. Are you (or perhaps a friend) facing something that’s so hard to deal with that you feel like you’re dying and you don’t want to face the process?

Today we’re going to look at Jesus’ resurrection from God’s point of view. Tomorrow we’ll see how the resurrection could help my friends—and us. Paul says that the truth of the resurrection makes a world of difference in how we live. The word *resurrection* comes from the combination of two Greek words: ANA for *up* and HISTĒMI for *to cause to stand*. Let’s look at what this could mean for us. From my study, I noticed Jesus’ last words:

- He *forgave* those who nailed him to the cross and who jeered at him. How His forgiveness must have comforted them later on when they realized what they had done to Him.
- He *cried out* to His Father because of what He was going through.
- He *committed* His spirit into His Father’s hands with a loud voice. That effort would have been excruciating since crucifixion made breathing and talking almost impossible.
- He *breathed* his last.
- He *was separated* from His Father because of our sin natures and individual sins that had been heaped upon Him.
- He *died* in our sins.
- But He didn’t *stay* dead.

God *accepted* Jesus’ sacrifice because His anger with and hatred of sin had been *satisfied*. And so God *caused* Jesus to *stand up*. Jesus didn’t do it on His own. He was resurrected to a whole new way of living that wasn’t limited to time and space. And the power of His resurrected life is in us through the Holy Spirit if we know and live with Jesus as Lord; He is our Savior.

Have something to say to the Father and the Son?

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 15:12-34

“Now if there is no resurrection . . . why do we endanger ourselves every hour? . . . If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’”

Yesterday we looked at Jesus’ resurrection so that today we could discover how His gift of resurrection life could be practical for us.

First let’s look at my friend with cancer. What hope does he have now that his cancer has returned? His hope is that if the cancer consumes his body, soon (6 months to 2 years) he’ll have a new body that’ll be like Jesus’; God will be a Husband to his young wife and Father to his three small children; and Jesus will be with him every step of the way, comforting, encouraging, and strengthening him (and everyone involved) until he sees his Lord face to face.

What about my friend who is facing a possible move away from her family and friends, away from where she’s grown up? She has the opportunity to trust God for her future; she gets to walk by faith and not by sight; she gets to die to what she wants and live to what her loving heavenly Father has for her as she walks with Him, step by step.

These responses may seem simplistic to you; I know they sound that way to me as I reread them. But I think that they’re the ones we have to struggle to get to as we face life’s hard times, because these hard times are unavoidable in this fallen world. The *truth* of Scripture must change how we think about circumstances and relationships and make decisions.

How is Jesus’ resurrection making a difference for you today?

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 15:35-58

“Listen, I tell you a mystery: we will not all sleep [stay dead], but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.”

Have you experienced the death of someone dear to you? Perhaps a parent has battled cancer or had a heart attack. Perhaps, if you're older, some of your friends are dying. Have *you* had sobering news from your doctor? Have you lost children through their early deaths or through a miscarriage? Just this morning as I was leaving church, one friend told me about her daughter who was facing a D&C because the doctor couldn't hear a heartbeat from her first grandchild. A woman I had been sitting next to confided that two of her close friends were dying of cancer. My husband and I are parentless because our four parents have died as a result of cancer, a brain tumor, Alzheimer's, and old age.

Why do we have to deal with death? Scripture tell us it's because sin entered the world through Adam's choice. Decay is a result of sin, and death is the natural result of decay. (If only Adam and Eve had believed God instead of the father of lies!) I think today's section is our hope as we face these times of death that are all around us.

This section of 1 Corinthians came alive for me as I watched my mom dying with a brain tumor. I watched as her body gave up on her and she had to endure the embarrassment and indignity of decay. Oh, the mourning we all did as mom's body wasted away and her mind slipped away piece by piece.

This passage became my rock as I counted on God to give her an incorruptible and imperishable body when she walked into eternity. I had inklings of what this new body was going to be like, because she came to know Jesus personally and emotionally *during* her surgery. She had known him intellectually before, but when she came out of the surgery, while much of her intellect was gone, she *knew* him. She was a different woman during her last year of life here on earth in her earthly body but with an eternal soul.

It's so easy to rail against God during these times, to doubt Him and His love and power. But I think we have to come to grips with the inevitability of death and all it encompasses, because it is the natural result of sin.

But let's not stay at this point. Let's look to what Jesus did, to how death is no longer the final answer, and to what Jesus promises us when we join Him and become like Him. A new life is coming.

How does this truth, this mystery revealed, affect you today?

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 16:1-4

“On the first day of every week [Sunday, resurrection day] each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.”

Have you gotten in the habit of regularly setting aside a portion of your income for God’s work and for God’s people who are in need? But did you notice that Paul wanted the Corinthians to do it—each one of them—on a particular day, on the first day of the week, the day they come together to celebrate Jesus’ resurrection? This act of faith (rather than saying, “But I need all I make to live on!”) is to be done regularly, sacrificially, and as an *act of worship*.

If you’re already in the habit of giving to your church or other Christian groups, has writing the checks become a *habit*—something you do when you pay your (other) bills? If so, how about writing your giving checks at a separate time, perhaps during your time with the Father, as an act of worship? You could pray for those receiving the money and think about how to love and encourage them. Perhaps you could increase your percentage of giving so you’re really giving by faith?

But what if you haven’t gotten into this routine yet? Are you thinking that when you “get ahead” you’ll give to God? When Barney and I were married, we got his debts along with the three growing sons. Money was tight, even on two fairly good incomes. We were frugal but didn’t have any extra. At some point we realized we weren’t tithing (10%) or even giving more than a token amount back to the Lord. So by faith we figured out the 10%, divided it by the number of paychecks, and started writing our giving checks. Ever since then money has not been an issue for us—even when Barney was laid off (now, that was an exciting time!).

Last year when we increased our percentage giving, we didn’t see how it would work out. But now we have more disposable income than we’ve ever had, we’re out of debt, we’re able to be generous, we’re putting the maximum toward retirement, and we’re ready to give more.

How would you describe your giving?

not at all _____ meager _____ generous _____

How would you *like* to describe your giving?

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 16:5-18

“Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men [and women] of courage; be strong. Do everything in love.”

As I read our words for today:

be on guard, stand firm, be courageous, be strong

I pictured soldiers, police, and firefighters who are defending us against those who wish to hurt or destroy us. These men and women are the ones who take new ground, put limitations on the dangers around us, and eliminate threats.

Is that what you feel like you're doing in your spiritual life, or wish that someone would do for you? But Paul adds one more critical element to their character:

do everything in love

Don't we warm to the photos of soldiers talking to and playing with children, police officers finding abducted children before they're harmed, and firefighters saving children and the elderly from certain death?

I think that the spiritual strength Paul is talking about includes *humility, tenderness, care for others, and a lifestyle of putting others' needs ahead of our own.*

As Paul finishes his rather harsh letter to the Corinthians, he's probably hoping and praying that these men and women are making huge changes in their lives, individually and corporately. But he knows the dangers that could come to them if they try to make changes on their own strength and try to do what's right without having hearts that are right.

How do *strength* and *courage* show up in your life? If they're missing, perhaps you need to start taking some stands *against* sin and sinful thinking and *for* what's important to God.

As you're taking these stands, be sure to *love* those who are around you, or you'll risk becoming strong in your own strength and missing out on what God has for you.

As you lovingly stand firm, have courage, and exhibit strength, others will see Jesus in you. What could be better?

Walking With the Father Through 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 16:19-24

"My love to all of you in Christ Jesus."

Has anyone ever had to come alongside you and spiritually set a broken bone? Or have ever listened to a sermon, heard a friend talk, or read a passage in the Bible and found yourself laid bare? I think we all have. Here are the hard words that the Corinthians have heard from Paul, Christ's ambassador to them.

You are mere infants in Christ—full of jealousy and quarreling.	3:14
Some of you have become arrogant.	4:18
You are proud of what should be an embarrassment.	5:2
You are boasting.	5:6
The lawsuits among you show you're already defeated.	6:7
You are playing with idolatry.	10:14
Your times together do more harm than good.	11:17
Many are weak and sick because of unconfessed sin.	11:30
You are thinking like children.	14:20
You see yourselves as the center of God's work on earth.	14:36
You aren't taking truth seriously; watch out for consequences.	15:2
You are hanging out with bad companions who are corrupting your good character.	15:33
Some in your midst are ignorant of God—to the shame of all.	15:34
You are asking foolish questions.	15:36
You may be treating God's servant (Timothy) badly.	16:10
You aren't submissive to those who are your shepherds.	16:16
Some in the church don't love the Lord.	16:22

Paul began this letter by reminding his readers that they are *sanctified* and have been called to be *holy* as a *community*. Now he concludes by reminding them—in his own hand—that he loves them. He's committed to them, cares for them, and wants to see them soon. But he has no idea of how they're going to respond to his hard-to-hear words. He's left wondering, unsettled, and having to depend on God for their spiritual lives.

How do you think—and hope—they'll respond? What thinking process do you hope they'll go through as they hear his words?

Is Paul speaking these words to you as well? Do you need to go through the same type of thinking process and have your heart healed? Perhaps you've had to say some hard-to-hear words to another and haven't seen a response. You're waiting and having to trust God to work. Don't let despair or worry control you. Instead, start reading 2 Corinthians.
