



BEING THE BODY OF CHRIST

Studies in 1 Corinthians

TOGETHER^{IN} FAITH SERIES
Leader Session Guide

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BEING THE BODY OF CHRIST: STUDIES IN 1 CORINTHIANS
Leader Session Guide

Together in Faith Series
Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies

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1 Corinthians
12:1-11

**Leader
Session
Guide**

Focus Statement

The Spirit of God activates generous gifts in each of us. Together in Christ, we are God's gift to the world!

Key Verse

"Now there are a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone." 1 Corinthians 12:4-6

Focus Image



"Wow!" Surprised by God's generous gifts! © RubberBall / SuperStock.

Do We See Ourselves as the Gifted Body of Christ?

Session Preparation

Before You Begin . . .

Take a moment to consider your gift of leadership for these sessions. Pause and read the key verse for this session. Read this verse with yourself in mind. How did you know you were called to this particular task? Did someone who recognized your giftedness ask you to serve in this way? Do you feel as though the Holy Spirit has activated the gift of leadership in you? Are there questions you still have? Is there someone whom you can ask to check in with you over the next four sessions to support you and your gift of leadership? As you begin this task, be confident that your leadership is a gift to this group and to your congregation.

Session Instructions

1. View the Session Prep Video.
2. Read this Session Guide completely and highlight or underline any portions you wish to emphasize with the group. Note any Bonus Activities you wish to do.
3. If you plan to do any special activities, check to see what materials you'll need: i.e. chart paper or a whiteboard for the Focus Activity.
4. Have extra Bibles on hand in case a member of the group forgets to bring one.
5. You may want to invite your church musician to help lead the Devotional Context activity. Consider meeting in a home or in a room in the church with an instrument to lead your singing.

Session Overview

Toward the end of this letter to the Corinthian church, Paul speaks to how essential it is to have a variety of spiritual gifts working within the body of Christ. Paul reminds the Corinthians that God activates these gifts so that Christians might serve God and neighbor instead of only self. By serving in the Spirit of Christ, the growing church in Corinth would experience an empowered unity of purpose with God's best interests for the whole community at heart.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Ancient Corinth was a town characterized by competition and one-upmanship in its family rivalries, commerce, and even spirituality. Corinthians worshiped Apollo at the sacred temple that led into the bustling city as well as Apollo's son, Asclepius, the god of healing. Every other year Corinthians also participated in the Isthmian Games to honor Poseidon, the sea god. "To become Corinthianized" in the ancient world was to be associated with materialism and improper behavior. Most likely the town gained this reputation because of the thousand sacred prostitutes who dwelled at the Temple of Aphrodite, but more recent scholarship has demonstrated this excess to be exaggerated. After the destruction of Corinth by the Romans in 146 B.C.E., many additional temples and shrines were erected in honor of the emperor and his family members. The Romans rebuilt Corinth in 44 B.C.E. and at the same time repopulated the city with Italian, Greek, Syrian, Egyptian and Judean freed slaves.

Arriving a century later, Paul recognized the diversity in Corinth as similar to his hometown of Tarsus. In Tarsus, Paul had been a Jewish Rabbi and a Roman citizen by virtue of his parents. Upon his conversion to Christianity, Paul encounters the profound relationship—"the intimate union"—between Jesus and the disciples who together make up a single body (Etienne Charpentier, *How to Read the New Testament*, Crossroads, 1982, p.46). **Unity** in Christ becomes the foundation of a Christian life for Paul and guides all he writes to the Corinthians. This unity is made visible through the community's expression of **creedal statements** such as "Jesus is Lord." The inaugural gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift of faith in baptism, creates community with Christ and one another.

? **Unity:**

Unity among God's people is not static but dynamic. Unity does not dismiss diversity but activates difference that it might function in accordance with God's grace.

? **Creedal statement:**

A formal statement of faith or belief such as "Jesus is Lord" announcing a central conviction held in common with others.

In the cosmopolitan context of Corinth, Paul describes a spirituality marked by gifts given and activated by the grace of one God for the good of all. These gifts are not meant to be tools of self-advancement, but for the common good. Paul is clear: diversity was not the cause for divisions within the Christian community, but rather selfish gain and positioning for status was the Corinthian problem. Held in union by a common creedal statement of faith in the same Lord Jesus Christ, the Corinthians had also been given individual gifts activated by the grace of the same God and empowered by the same Spirit.

LITERARY CONTEXT

Handwritten letters are meaningful because they tell stories and speak directly to the depth and reality of daily experience. In the same way, Paul's letter to the Corinthian church is intimate and revealing. Paul cares deeply for this infant church as their spiritual parent and is eager to nourish their formation into the body of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 4:14-21). Paul's letters have two aims: 1) to encourage continued faithfulness and 2) to urge a return to the right path (Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul & His Letters*, Eerdmans, 2004, p. 77). Because Paul identifies himself as the spiritual parent of the Corinthians, he feels compelled to encourage or exhort this family of believers to live in the way of Jesus Christ (see 1 Corinthians 4: 14-21).

The opening words of chapter 12 “now concerning” reveal that Paul is speaking to a specific concern that the community has asked him to address (see also 1 Corinthians 7:1 and 8:1). Paul deals more directly with the church's concern about “speaking in tongues” in chapter 14, but in chapter 12 he begins to discuss the problem more broadly, outlining the theological basis of spiritual gifts. Christianity was not the only spirituality in Corinth. Though we might think of the *charisms* listed in 1 Corinthians 12 as unique to Christianity, the Christians at Corinth would have recognized many of these *charisms* as part and parcel of pagan spirituality and practice. It is not the *charism*, as much as how it is used, that is important for Paul. Charisms are received, not possessed, and all gifts are given activity through the grace and wisdom of God alone.

LUTHERAN CONTEXT

The Latin term for “simultaneously saint and sinner” is *simul justus et peccator*. In the book *Crazy Talk* (Augsburg Books, 2008), Rolf Jacobson writes, “The term effectively means that even though God has made you holy by saving you from yourself, you are still yourself, and thus, you fully still suck.” This is how Paul describes himself in Romans 7: 19-20. “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is not longer I that do it, but that sin dwells within me.” In his own writings, Martin Luther uses colorful adjectives for sinners: poor, miserable, condemned, despicable, foolish, weak and unworthy. The recipients of 1 Corinthians may have thought this way about themselves. However, both Paul and Luther knew something about the transforming power of the Gospel.

**Charisms:**

Gifts that are received and activated by the Holy Spirit. Another common association is “that which is of the Spirit.” Paul popularizes this term making it uniquely Christian, the result of God's gracious act.