

TO KNOW
HIM MORE:
SEEKING GOD
THROUGH THE
LETTERS TO THE
CORINTHIANS

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INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

This study is a journey through the letters to the Corinthians with the sole purpose of drawing us closer to God. It is easy for us to approach His Word with the desire to know more about God but our longing should be to **know Him more**. We are warned in I Corinthians 8:1 that *knowledge puffs up, but love builds up*. As we grow in our relationship with God, our love for Him deepens and we are built up. If we pursue His Word for the sake of knowledge, we will become puffed up and filled with pride. As we walk with the Lord, we shouldn't be inflated but deflated as we see ourselves in comparison to Him. This does not mean that we should look down on ourselves and have low self-esteem, rather we should have a realistic view of who we are compared to Who God is. In regards to this, I believe John the Baptist said it best: *He {Jesus} must increase, but I must decrease* (John 3:30 - NKJ).

The theme verse for this study comes from Psalms:

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? (Psalm 42:1-2)

May we have such a hunger and thirst for God that we cannot wait to fellowship with Him.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This workbook is designed to guide you through the letters to the Corinthians. I have used the New International Version of the Bible as my main text but have also consulted other versions. Each week has five lessons which you are to complete on your own. When we join together, I will teach a message that enhances the material covered in the workbook and then we will share and discuss the things the Lord has shown us through our study. Each lesson begins by asking you to read the passage for the day and then write down any insights, questions or comments that come to mind. **I believe this is the most important part of the workbook.** It is the time when each of us asks God to show us what *He* would have us see. God wants to speak to each of us individually and feed us directly from His hand (*Ps. 119:102*), but too often we skip this crucial step and just learn through the teachings of others. My prayer is that He will be your teacher and show you amazing things in His Word. I count it a privilege to share with you the things He has revealed to me.

PRAYERS ABOUND!!!

As I was preparing this study, the Lord burdened my heart to pray for those ladies who would choose to work through it. He gave me a different verse to pray over you for each week of lessons. I will share these verses at the beginning of each new week. I have also prayed these verses over myself as I sat before the Lord and wrote this study. Praying God's Word back to Him is powerful and I encourage you to cover yourself with these Scriptures as you walk through this workbook. May He receive all the glory for the fruit that He bears in our lives!

DISCLAIMER!!!

The one thing that has always frustrated me about Bible study workbooks is that at times, I have no idea what the author is asking! I would like to declare, here and now, that if that happens to you while you are working through this book, the problem is with me! Please don't get hung up on something and think less of yourself because you're not sure where I'm going. The reason something may not be clear is probably because I have not communicated it clearly. If this happens, just make a note of and it move on.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

I would like to encourage you to do something before you begin this workbook. It is always a good idea to get an overall view of a book of the Bible before we begin digging for the deeper truths. To this end, **I would ask you to read through the entire book of I Corinthians before doing Lesson One.** You don't have to read it in one sitting, simply set your own pace and enjoy the journey. Once you have finished it, you will have a frame of reference for all the things the Lord will show us through this study. But mostly, I believe that once you have read I Corinthians from cover to cover, God will capture your heart and give you a hunger to continue studying this wondrous portion of His Word.

A FINAL WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT

May these words bless you and vocalize the prayer of your heart.

A HEART LIKE JESUS'

*I just want to have a heart like Jesus'
Want to see the world right through His eyes
I want to know Him in my inner being
Want to see His fruit grow in my life*

*All He asks is that I love Him fully
With my heart and all my soul and mind
And to love those who are all around me
Spread His light and life to all mankind*

*So my soul cries out, to You O God
Please draw me to Your side
So I can have a heart like Yours'
And in You I'll abide
And in You I'll abide*

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TO KNOW HIM MORE:
SEEKING GOD THROUGH THE LETTERS
TO THE CORINTHIANS

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Week One
THE MIND OF CHRIST

I praise the Lord for leading you to this workbook and count it a privilege to walk side by side with you on this journey through Paul's letters to the Corinthians. There are so many treasures for us to discover!

As we begin our study, we will be introduced to a church that has been experiencing many difficulties, most of which were the result of their sin. This personal letter from Paul to the Believers in Corinth opens with words of encouragement then goes on to address some of the problems they are facing. Divisions, misguided allegiances, prideful attitudes, apathy in their walks with the Lord and warnings about how to build upon the foundation of Christ are just some of the issues Paul addresses in the first three chapters of this epistle which we will be covering this week. As we begin to see ourselves in some of the actions and attitudes of the Corinthians, may we allow the Lord to speak truth to our hearts and grow us in these areas so that we may draw ever closer and more dependent on our Heavenly Father. To the praise of His glorious Name!

As I prepared each week of lessons, the Lord gave me a verse to pray over all of the ladies who would choose to walk this path with me. I have also prayed these verses over myself. The one He gave me for this first week is Psalm 25:4-5:

*Show me your ways, O LORD, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.*

It is God Who is our teacher and we must look to Him to reveal His ways and His truths to us. He is our guide so let's choose to follow Him wherever He leads us. He alone is our Savior and our hope - only and always. May we pray these verses over ourselves each time we sit and study His Word this week and not only ask but allow God to show us all the things He wants us to see.

*Lesson One ~ Words of Encouragement
Lesson Two ~ Loss of Focus
Lesson Three ~ Wisdom vs. Foolishness
Lesson Four ~ Only God
Lesson Five ~ Buildings*

*Week One, Lesson One***WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT**

*I hope you are excited about this journey we are about to embark upon through I Corinthians!
Before we get into the Scriptures, we need to have a little background information to
help set the scene.*

GETTING STARTED

I trust that you have taken my suggestion and read through I Corinthians and that the Lord has already encouraged and challenged you through it. Any time we approach the study of a book of the Bible, it is important to start with some background information on the book itself, the recipients and the circumstances surrounding it. This will give us an overall framework within which we can place the nuggets of truth we collect along the way. Once the stage is set, we can dive into the Scriptures with a better understanding of who is saying what to whom and why it is being said.

THE CITY OF CORINTH

The city of Corinth is located on the four mile wide isthmus that connects Peloponnesus (southern Greece) to the mainland of Europe, and is situated between the Ionian and Aegean Seas. It's geographical position made it a major trade route and thus a center for international commerce. With much business came great wealth which led to corruption and immorality. Even in the heathen world the city of Corinth stood out in its' debauchery. To *Corinthianize* became a synonym for an impure life and the Greek word *korinthiazomai* (literally "to act the Corinthian") came to mean *to commit fornication*. The city housed the famous Temple of Aphrodite which had one thousand sacred prostitutes. The population, which in the first century numbered nearly four hundred thousand, was very cosmopolitan and was comprised of Greeks, Romans, Syrians, Jews, Egyptians, and a large number of slaves. Corinth was also a place of refinement and learning and was a center of art, philosophy and religion.

THE CHURCH AT CORINTH

The apostle Paul planted the Corinthian church on his second missionary journey (approximately 50-52 AD) and ministered there for one and a half years (see Acts 18). The congregation was primarily made up of Gentiles although there were some Jews who were a part of this Body of Believers. After Paul's departure, Apollos, the great orator and herald of the faith, continued the work that Paul had begun as can be seen in I Corinthians 3:6: *I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow*. The influence of the vile culture which surrounded the church and the old ways and mindset of its' members took their toll and many Believers slipped back into sinful practices. When Paul heard of their situation, he was led by the Holy Spirit to write to them.

THE LETTERS TO THE CORINTHIANS

During his third missionary journey, while Paul was ministering in Ephesus, he penned the New Testament epistle (or letter) of I Corinthians. It is believed to have been written some time between 55-57 AD. It is interesting to note that this was not his first correspondence to the church at Corinth (I Cor. 5:9) however that original letter was never recovered. This epistle was written in response to reports Paul had heard regarding the problems, divisions and immorality in the church as well as a way of answering some questions that had been posed to him directly through a letter sent by some Corinthian Believers. Because much of this epistle deals with Biblical answers to specific issues, I Corinthians contains a great deal of practical theology that can be easily applied to our lives and the problems we face in our world and churches today. I Corinthians is an epistle of sanctification and teaches us how to be in the world but not of it.

Now that we know a little bit about the Corinthians we can begin to study this powerful and practical portion of God's Word. This sacred letter opens with words of encouragement to both the inhabitants of Corinth in the first century and us!

Passage for Today: I CORINTHIANS 1:1-9

Please read the passage and share any insights, questions, comments or anything that comes to your mind regarding it. This will be our practice in each lesson. We need to read and digest the Word and allow the Holy Spirit to reveal things to us first. I will then share with you the things God has shown me.

OPENING WORDS (*I Corinthians 1:1-3*)

As we begin our study in I Corinthians, we must start with the opening words of this letter. It would be easy to read through these few verses and see them as merely a greeting but there is much packed into them that can be both a blessing and challenge to us.

Paul chooses to identify himself as an apostle. Why would he do this? Wouldn't the Corinthians have already known that? According to Acts 18, Paul had ministered to them for a year and a half. They knew him, fellowshiped with him and sat under his teaching. Why would he state that he is an apostle? Before addressing this question, perhaps we should take a step back and clarify the term itself.

What is an apostle?

This is a word we see many times in the Scriptures and often hear in sermons and Bible studies but what exactly is an apostle? When we hear the term we might immediately think of the twelve men who were chosen by Jesus to be His followers. They were officially designated as apostles (Lk. 6:13-15) and were directly commissioned by Christ to minister in His Name (Mk. 3:14-15, 6:6-13, 30). Matthias was called to be an apostle to replace Judas Iscariot and was prayerfully appointed because he met the requirements of having been with the Lord throughout His earthly ministry (Acts 1:21-22). Paul was considered an apostle because he had been directly appointed by Christ on the road to Damascus to share the Good News (Acts 9:1-19; I Cor. 15:3-8). James, the half brother of Jesus who was a prominent leader in the early church and penned the epistle that bears his name, was called an apostle because of his encounter with the risen Christ (I Cor. 15:7, Gal. 1:19). So then, is the title of apostle limited to those who have seen Jesus face to face?

To answer this question we first need to look at the term itself. The Greek word is *apostolos* and means *one sent forth ... a delegate; specially, an ambassador of the Gospel* (Vines/Strong's). With this broader definition we can safely assume that a direct encounter with Christ, either in the flesh or post resurrection, is not necessary to be considered an apostle. To confirm this, we must go to the Scriptures which bear it out. Barnabas was called an apostle (Acts 14:14) as were Andronicus and Junias (Rom. 16:7). Jesus Christ Himself is considered an apostle (Heb. 3:1) because He was sent by God. We must, however, keep in mind

that there is a distinction between being called an apostle and the office of apostle which is restricted to the Twelve who were with Jesus, Paul and perhaps James the half brother of Christ.

With this perhaps fuller understanding of what an apostle is, explain why Paul might have referred to himself in this way? What can we learn about him from this?

Paul was a humble man who knew *what* he was called to do and *that* he was called to do it. He didn't choose to go to Corinth or anywhere else, he was sent. Right from the start of this letter Paul is acknowledging that he is merely an ambassador for Christ, a humble servant who has been commissioned by the Most High to preach the Good News. Not only does this reflect well on his character but it also shows that he has come with authority from the throne as there were some in this church he had planted who challenged his position (I Cor. 9:1-2) and criticized him personally and his teaching (II Cor. 10:10). It was important for him to establish that he is not speaking on his own but is rather communicating the truths, rebukes and encouragement of God. I was blessed to discover that Paul began many of his letters in this way (Romans, II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, I & II Timothy and Titus).

This letter was written by Paul while he was in Ephesus. According to the salutation, he was there with a Believer by the name of Sosthenes. It is not clear exactly who this is. It might be the same man that is mentioned in Acts 18 who was named ruler of the synagogue in Corinth to replace Crispus after he came to a saving knowledge of Christ through the ministry of Paul. Since Sosthenes was a common name in the Greek world, it cannot be assumed that they are one in the same although it also cannot be ruled out.

The epistle is addressed to the Believers in Corinth who were sanctified and called to be holy (or saints). Explain what this means and how it can be an encouragement and an exhortation to us.

Although this letter was sent to the Corinthians, it was also meant for *all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ-- their Lord and ours* (I Cor. 1:2). That's us - if we have a personal relationship with Christ. May we never forget that God has written this letter to each of us - individually - and we need to be open to receive all that He has for us. I hope that excites you - it certainly blesses my heart! Even though we know that He is going to show us some wonderful things and some things that will be hard to see, we should be encouraged and humbled that He desires to speak truth to each of our hearts! To Him be the glory!!

Back to the question at hand. To be sanctified means to be set apart from our sin and cleansed by the blood of Jesus. The designation here refers to all Believers as that is what happens when we come to a saving knowledge of Christ. The verse continues to say that we are *called to be holy* (or saints - again meaning set apart and pure). This expresses two things. First of all that our salvation comes from God and there is nothing we could ever do to gain it and second, that we are called to live our lives set apart from the world and the sin that is so prevalent. In other words, we are made holy by God yet we are also called to lead a holy life. Of course we cannot do that without God's Spirit Who indwells us but we can choose not to set ourselves apart and continue to sin. That is what the Corinthians were doing and is unfortunately a choice

that we sometimes make as well. There are two verses that beautifully convey both parts of this. In Hebrews 10:10 we see that ... *we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all* and according to I Peter 1:15: ... *just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do* (underline mine). One is an act that is done at salvation and the other, a mandate to pursue holiness in all that we think, say and do.

In what specific ways can we pursue holiness?

ENRICHED (*I Corinthians 1:4-9*)

I love how this section begins. Paul shares with his brothers and sisters in the Lord that he thanks God for them. When we keep in mind his reason for writing this letter, that takes on a much deeper meaning. The Corinthian church had slipped into the ways and thought patterns of the world and were struggling with many sins. When Paul heard of this he was led by the Holy Spirit to pour light and truth over their congregation through a letter. Even in their sinful state, Paul is still thankful to God for them and commends them. If we are ever called to share some difficult truths with a sister in Christ regarding a sin in her life, may we begin with sincere words of encouragement because there is almost always something positive we can share.

What does it mean to be enriched? Explain how that might present itself in their speaking (utterance) and knowledge. What is Paul saying to them? What is God saying to us?

Because of His wonderful grace, God has enriched or made us rich in every way!! This enrichment is a sign that the Holy Spirit indwells us and confirms our salvation (1:6). God has given us abundance in all areas. In regards to speaking, this can express itself in teaching, exhorting, encouraging and just about anything else we can do with our mouths. For the Corinthians, this specifically included the gift of tongues which they valued highly. As far as knowledge is concerned, the sky's the limit!! As Believers, we are inhabited by the Spirit of God, the Author of the Scriptures. Our Heavenly Father wants us to understand His Word and He will enable us to if only we will let Him. He wants to teach each of us directly but too often we instead choose to only feed on the wisdom and understanding of others. It is great to sit under a preacher or teacher and be blessed by what the Lord has shown him but we are also called to sit at God's feet and let Him speak truths to our hearts through His Word. Psalm 119:102 is very clear on this: *I have not departed from your laws, for you yourself have taught me.* The Corinthians were taught by Paul, Apollos and others but the abundance of their knowledge came not just from these outside sources but from the Spirit of God that was within them.

How is this commendation (v.5) also potentially a condemnation for both the Corinthians and us?

II Peter 1:3 tells us that God's *divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness*. Paul began this letter by reminding the Corinthians and us that we are *enriched in every way*. Since this is the case, we have no reason to continue in sin. Now, we know that we still have our sinful nature which tempts us (James 1:13-15), entices us to do the things we shouldn't do and encourages us to abandon the things we ought to do (see Rom. 7:14-20), but the victory has been won. Although we struggle and sometimes fail, we are called and enabled to live an abundant life (Jn. 10:10)! Hallelujah!!

In his letter to the church at Rome, the apostle Paul sums up this internal battle in this way: *So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God-- through Jesus Christ our Lord!* (Rom. 7:21-25). The desire to sin will come but we must fight against it by being on guard and submitting ourselves to our Lord Who Himself was tempted in all ways yet was without sin (Heb. 4:15). Just like the Corinthians, we should know better because God has enriched us with His knowledge. None of us has an excuse to continue in sin but the praise is that we don't have to! Once things are brought into the light and God shows us where we are sinning, we can confess and repent and, by His grace, walk in freedom for we are no longer slaves to sin but rather slaves to righteousness (see Rom. 6:17-18).

What did Paul mean when he said that they (and we) do not lack or come short in any spiritual gift?

As the passage continues, we see that this enrichment from our Lord extends itself into our gifting. Remember, this letter is to the church at Corinth and although much of it can be applied to individuals, it is written to a Body of Believers. When he is saying that they lack no spiritual gift, it means within their congregation. Each one of us is individually given spiritual gifts from God at conversion but we are not all endowed with all the gifts. God distributes His gifts in His way so that Christians must work together to accomplish His plans. If each of us had all the spiritual gifts we wouldn't need anyone else, but God wants us to balance each other and minister side by side for His glory. The Corinthians had a very skewed view of their giftings (I Cor. 12-14) so we will be looking into them more deeply later on in this study.

As we use our gifts for the King, we should be eagerly anticipating His return (1:7). Jesus Christ is coming back to earth to judge the world then reign and rule for eternity! We should have this in the forefront of our minds so that we will be ready when He comes. This can also allow us to be more faithful in our walk with and ministry for Jesus because we don't know how much time we have left to be fruitful for Him and lead others into the kingdom.

How should the imminent return of Christ affect your thoughts, activities and attitudes this and every day? Please be very specific then ask the Lord to give you that eternal perspective so that you can be effective for Him today while looking forward to meeting Him face to face.

What a wonderful promise we see in I Corinthians 1:8-9! God is the One Who will keep us strong and blameless for He is the only One Who can!! He is faithful and nothing we do or don't do can affect that. II Timothy 2:13 reminds us that *if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself*. Consider this in light of the sin in the lives of the Corinthian Believers which precipitated this letter. Now, think of it in light of the sin in our own lives.

How can God's faithfulness to us affect our lives and our walk with Him?

The truth that God loves us so much that He refuses to give up on us is humbling and should draw us closer to our Heavenly Father. We should want to be faithful to Him as a way of thanking and honoring Him for His faithfulness to us. When we have failed and fallen into sin, this promise allows us to run back to Him knowing that He will scoop us into His arms and forgive and restore us. We must, however, be very careful not to use God's faithfulness as an excuse to do whatever we want to do (Rom. 6:1-2). Although He is always there for us and will accept us back when we have gone astray, there are consequences to our actions. While in sin, we have little or no fellowship with our Lord. We are also wasting precious time that could be used to advance the Kingdom of God. Our witness suffers terribly when we are disobedient to Christ and our actions and attitudes adversely affect those around us. May the blessing of God's faithfulness bring us closer to Him and motivate us to walk that narrow path we began at our conversion.

ENCOURAGING WORDS

I trust that these opening verses of I Corinthians have blessed your heart. God wants to speak words of encouragement to us and we need to receive them. We also must put into practice those things that He reveals as He encourages. May we remember His words to us in the first section of this wonderful letter and ask God to prepare us for what He has in store for each of us as we continue to study this portion of His Word.

*May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through.
May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.
I Thessalonians 5:23-24*