

Mark Dever
and Carl Laferton

1 Corinthians

1–9

Challenging Church



 7-Session Bible Study

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1 Corinthians 1 – 9: Challenging Church

A Good Book Guide

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This edition printed 2025.

Published by The Good Book Company

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Design by André Parker and Drew McCall

ISBN: 9781802541434 | JOB-008391 | Printed in India

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Introduction

One of the Bible writers described God's word as "a lamp for my feet, a light on my path" (Psalm 119:105, NIV). God gave us the Bible to tell us about who he is and what he wants for us. He speaks through it by his Spirit and lights our way through life.

That means that we need to look carefully at the Bible and uncover its meaning—but we also need to apply what we've discovered to our lives.

Good Book Guides are designed to help you do just that. The sessions in this book are interactive and easy to lead. They're perfect for use in groups or for personal study.

Let's take a look at what is included in each session.

Talkabout: Every session starts with an ice-breaker question, designed to get people talking around a subject that links to the Bible study.

Investigate: These questions help you explore what the passage is about.

Apply: These questions are designed to get you thinking practically: what does this Bible teaching mean for you and your church?

Explore More: These optional sections help you to go deeper or to explore another part of the Bible which connects with the main passage.

Getting Personal: These sections are a chance for personal reflection. Some groups may feel comfortable discussing these, but you may prefer to look at them quietly as individuals instead—or leave them out.

Pray: Here, you're invited to pray in the light of the truths and challenges you've seen in the study.

Each session is also designed to be easily split into two! Watch out for the **Apply** section that comes halfway through, and stop there if you haven't got time to do the whole thing in one go.

In the back of the book, you'll find a **Leader's Guide**, which provides helpful notes on every question, along with everything else that group leaders need in order to facilitate a great session and help the group uncover the riches of God's light-giving word.

Why Study 1 Corinthians 1 – 9?

Even today, Jesus is still a figure of intense interest and admiration for millions. His stories and sayings still inhabit our minds 2,000 years after he lived, and to many there is something compellingly beautiful about him.

But then there's the church. If you've grown up in a church, you've probably got some good reasons to be disillusioned with it. The church seems like a boring topic for most and a reluctantly fulfilled duty for many. If you introduce the subject, you'll often find it meets with responses ranging from a mild disinterest to a real dislike.

And we can understand why. Churches say they have the best news in the world, that they have the answer to our problems, that they are God's embassies on earth; and yet churches are made up of people like you and me, who are grumpy, irritable, unfaithful, selfish, and worse. Too possessive of small things and too casual about great ones. Too defensive of our interests and too often ignoring God.

And as that is sadly true of churches today, so it was of the church God had set up in Corinth through the apostle Paul. It was young, it was full of life, and it was just as full of problems. We see no single congregation in the New Testament in which there were more issues and of such differing kinds. What would God say to such a challenging church? What did they need to be excited by, to listen to, to learn?

This Good Book Guide will help you to open up the first nine chapters of the letter of 1 Corinthians. It is a long, varied, and often complex book. These studies are not a hike through every small detail but more of a helicopter ride enabling you to see its peaks, as you hear what God said to his church in Corinth and what God still says to his church today.



1 Corinthians 54-55 AD

49-50

Paul preaches in Corinth and sets up the church

51

Paul leaves Corinth

54-55

Paul sends the letters of 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians

1

Count Your Blessings

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Talkabout

1. How forgetful are you, and what sort of things do you tend to forget?

- Have you ever forgotten something which led to a comedy moment?
Or a serious problem?

Investigate

 Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

DICTIONARY

Apostle (v 1): someone chosen and sent by Jesus to teach and serve the Christian church.

Sosthenes (v 1): possibly a former Jewish leader (see Acts 18:17). Now one of Paul's coworkers.

Sanctified (v 2): made clean and pure.

Holy (v 2): set apart; totally pure.

Grace (v 3, 4): undeserved kindness.

2. Who is this letter from and to?

God had used Paul to establish the church in Corinth in Greece during his second "missionary journey," in about AD 50-51 (you can read about it in Acts 18). It was a few years later, probably between 52 and 55, that Paul wrote this letter to the church God had planted through him.

Corinth was a major crossroads between the eastern and western parts of the Roman Empire. A great trading centre, with people moving in and out all the time, it had a reputation for immorality and for its many religions. In other words, its society was much like many today.

3. Turn forward to these verses later on in the letter to see what this church was like.

- 1:10-11

- 4:18

- 5:1

- 6:6-7

- 11:20-21

- 15:34

- Is this a church you would like to be a part of?

4. Back in chapter 1, pick out the ways Paul describes what has happened to these Corinthians, and fill in the “What?” column in the table below.

	What?	How?
v 2		
v 4		
v 5		
v 9		

Paul is helping them to recall the riches of God’s blessing of Jesus. And did you notice that, in verse 2, these Christians are described as already “sanctified (set apart as pure) in Christ Jesus”; but they are also “called” to be holy (to *become* set apart as pure). So are they set apart or not?!

God has declared Christians to be set apart in right relationship with him because Christ's holiness and righteousness has been accounted, or freely given, to them. A Christian's status is "holy." But they are also called to *become* holy, to have lives which more fully reflect God's character: lives like they were meant to have. Having been made holy in Christ, they are now to live more and more as the people he has made them to be, living in accordance with their status as holy people.

5. What is the church looking forward to?

6. What will they be on that day? Why can they be confident they will still be Christians then?

7. Why is verse 7 an encouraging reminder for a church, particularly if it is small or struggling?

Getting Personal | OPTIONAL

Do you ever think to yourself that you could do this or that as a Christian, if only you had been given this gift (better memory, sense of humor, teaching ability) or that circumstance (more time, greater wealth, different family, bigger church)?

Verse 7 says there is *no* spiritual gift you lack as a church. In which area do you need to stop making excuses and get on with living and working for God? Or do you need to stop thinking you can do everything yourself, and remember that you need to use your gifts for your church, and rely on others in your church to use their gifts to help and encourage you?

8. Who has blessed, or gifted, these Corinthians in this way? What are we told about his character in verse 9, and why is this important?

9. What does Paul tell his readers he is doing, in verse 4?

10. Think about what the Corinthian church was like. What is surprising about verse 4?

- Why do you think Paul began his letter by talking about what God had given them?

11. Go back to the table on page 9. For each of those verses, fill in “How” it is that God gives his church each of the blessings you’ve listed in the “What” column.

Explore More | OPTIONAL

 **Read Romans 8:31b-32**

- How are Christians able to know that God really will give them what they need to keep going in their faith?
-

Apply

12. What do you think Paul wanted the Corinthians to do as they read these verses? What would he want us to do today?

13. How can we imitate Paul:

- in our prayers?
- as we speak to our Christian friends?

14. Look at the table on page 9. Which blessing has particularly struck you?

- How can you make sure you call God's generosity to mind regularly through the course of each day?

Getting Personal | OPTIONAL

Have you forgotten how much you have been given by God in Christ? Do you tend to focus on what you haven't been given in life, rather than on what you have?

Which blessing from God could you give thanks for each day for a month?

Who can you share that blessing with this week?

Pray

- *For other Christians, based on verse 4.*
- *For your church, based on verse 7.*
- *For yourself, giving thanks for a particular blessing you've been reminded of in this passage.*
- *For people, situations, and issues which are on your group's hearts at the moment.*