

COMMUNITY AND CONFLICT

Realities of the Church in Corinth and in Our Congregation

A Leader's Guide for a
Twelve-Session Interactive Study of 1 Corinthians

To be used with

1 Corinthians

Believers Church Bible Commentary
Herald Press, 2017

By Dan Nighswander

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Herald Press
Harrisonburg, Virginia

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A Leader's Guide for a Twelve-Session Interactive Study of 1 Corinthians

By Dan Nighswander

This group study guide is designed to be used with *1 Corinthians* by Dan Nighswander (Believers Church Bible Commentary; Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2017), referred to below as "Commentary."¹

The goal is to help contemporary readers to enter into the world of the New Testament in order to understand and interpret Paul's letter to the faith community in Corinth.² The heart of the format is small group discussions in which participants take on roles of first-century Corinthian believers as they listen and respond to selections from Paul's letter.

The suggested session outlines are designed for use in a standard forty-five or sixty-minute adult education hour. Adapt them to your setting, available time, and needs or interests of the participants. If you have fewer than twelve weeks available, choose the sessions that are most important for your group—for example, sessions 1, 2, 4 or 5, 6; or 7, 9, 10.

ADVANCE PREPARATION

1. Invite people to join this study. Make sure they know the goal and format of the study (above). Encourage them to purchase the Commentary. Ask them to bring a Bible.
2. Order copies of the Commentary for the leader(s) and for class participants.
3. Plan your meeting space. You will need enough room to form small clusters and also to talk together as a whole group. For the first session you may want equipment to project a video (optional).
4. Print and copy handouts (below, following p. 27).
5. Make name tags for each character, or ask participants to make their own name tags. Ask people to wear the tags to class and to address each other by their character names in the discussions that are "from the perspective of your character."

1 For additional resources, see below.

2 Those who want to focus study on the details of 1 Corinthians may rather read and discuss the Commentary, paying more attention to the Explanatory Notes. If you do this, save some time for discussing the Text in the Life of the Church sections.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Of the many commentaries available on 1 Corinthians, I especially recommend Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox, 1997) and Anthony C. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

For more detailed commentaries based on the Greek text, see Gordon D. Fee's *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New International Commentary on the New Testament; 2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014) or Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (The New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

Learn more about life in ancient Corinth in the easy-to-read *A Week in the Life of Corinth* by Ben Witherington III (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), which introduces readers to the social context of Paul's letter through a fictional character.

The internet has a lot of information about ancient Corinth. The archive of over a century of archaeological excavations is available at <http://corinth.ascsa.net>. A 3D animated tour of Corinth can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dEHPfMIyLfc>. See also the video by Ian Paul and Stephen Travis at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ynhH6tPeFLo&t=208s>.

Creating a Scene in Corinth: A Simulation by Reta Halteman Finger and George D. McClain (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2013) provides background to life in Corinth and suggests ways to role play characters who might have been in the faith community there. It provided the inspiration for my own study guide.

I have created a five-session guide to worship, prayer, and study called "Praying Over the Broken Body of Christ" (Mennonite Church Canada, 2004), which is available for free download at <http://www.commonword.ca/SelectDownloadFormat/16/6461>.

Session 1: Getting Oriented

As we begin our study of 1 Corinthians, we need to clarify our expectations, learn about Corinth in AD 50, and discuss the letter opening to set the stage for the following sessions.

PREPARATION

1. Read the lesson outline and plan any adjustments necessary for your group.
2. Read the Scripture (1 Cor 1:1-9) and Commentary, pp. 21-58.
3. Print handouts: “Class Outline and Reading List” and “Character Profiles” (one character for each participant).
4. Assign Scripture reader. Those playing the character of Sosthenes or Chloe would be especially appropriate choices to read the assigned portion of 1 Corinthians from a modern translation. (I recommend the New Living Bible, New International Version, or New Revised Standard Version.) Ask them to prepare in advance. Most effective is printing the text to be read as a letter, perhaps even in scroll format.

CLASS OUTLINE

1. Open with prayer for enlightenment.
2. Introduce the format of the study.
 - Hand out the reading list and course plan (see handouts below). Encourage everyone to read the whole letter, since only excerpts will be read in class.
 - Encourage reading the commentary for each section.
 - Explain that each session will involve:
 - Some introductory information;
 - Hearing a portion of the assigned reading;
 - Small group discussion as if we were believers in first-century Corinth;
 - Discussion of what we can learn for our church’s life.
 - Distribute Character Profiles and give time for everyone to read theirs.
3. Background to 1 Corinthians:
Watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ynhH6tPeFLo&t=208s> or summarize “Introduction to 1 Corinthians” in Commentary, pp. 21-33.
4. Form discussion groups of four or five persons, each with a different character. Have participants roleplay their character by introducing themselves by name and offering two or three important facts about themselves (e.g., “My name is Suria. I am a slave and a midwife and I have important spiritual gifts.”)
5. Invite the assigned reader to read 1 Cor 1:1-9, while others listen from the perspective of their character. Ask participants *not* to follow along in their Bibles, explaining that the Corinthians received the letter orally.
6. Discuss in small groups: From the perspective of your character, what do you hear? This will require more self-introduction.
7. Optional: In small groups, not in character, compose a thanksgiving for your congregation as Paul did in vv. 4-9.
8. In the large group, invite feedback about what you learned and about the class format. Urge reading and preparation for next week.
9. Close in prayer for the grace to live into God’s will, both individually and as a body of believers.

Session 2: Power and Conflict

1 Corinthians 1:10-17; 4:1-21

We will explore conflicts in Corinth and in our own church experiences. What role does leadership play? What are appropriate expectations of church leaders?

PREPARATION

1. Read the lesson outline and plan any adjustments necessary for your group.
2. Read the Scripture (1 Cor 1:1:10-17; 4:1-21) and Commentary, pp. 59–72, 114–30.
3. Print handouts: extra copies of “Class Outline and Reading List” and “Character Profiles” for newcomers.
4. Assign Scripture reader. Those playing the character of Sosthenes or Chloe would be especially appropriate choices to read the assigned portion of 1 Corinthians from a modern translation. (I recommend the New Living Bible, New International Version, or New Revised Standard Version.) Ask them to prepare in advance. Most effective is printing the text to be read as a letter, perhaps even in scroll format.

CLASS OUTLINE

1. Open with prayer for enlightenment.
2. Distribute Character Profiles to anyone who is new or has forgotten their character, and allow a few minutes to get familiar with them.
3. Form discussion groups of four or five persons, no two with the same character. Introduce yourself by name and two or three important facts (e.g., “My name is Suria. I am a slave and a midwife and I have important spiritual gifts.”) It will be better to form new discussion groups for each session so that all participants get exposed to the full range of people in the church.
4. Background: Read or share in your own way, “Patrons and Clients” (Commentary, pp. 366–67).
5. Invite the assigned reader to read 1 Cor 1:10-17; 4:14-21 while others listen from the perspective of their character. Don’t follow along in your Bible; the Corinthians received the letter orally.
6. Discuss in small groups: From the perspective of your character, what do you think of Paul?
7. Read “Who Told Paul What? What Chloe’s People Said” (Commentary, pp. 371–72).
8. Discuss in small groups: From the perspective of your character, should Chloe’s people have told Paul the “secrets” of the church and its members?
9. Discuss in small groups or whole group, not in character: What divides our congregation? Should we keep secrets about inappropriate behavior in the church? What influence do leaders have in creating or in addressing conflict?
10. If you have extra time, discuss “Factionalism” (Commentary, pp. 70–71) or “If We Believe It’s God’s Church” (Commentary, pp. 110–13).
11. Close in prayer for the grace to live into God’s will, both individually and as a body of believers.

Session 3: Conflicting Values

1 Corinthians 1:18–3:23

Before addressing their questions, Paul has to reorient the Corinthian believers' understanding of the values of God's reign. Are our values aligned with God's values or with the values of people outside of God's sphere?

PREPARATION:

1. Read the lesson outline and plan any adjustments necessary for your group.
2. Read the Scripture (1 Cor 1:18-3:23) and Commentary, pp. 73–113, 127–30.
3. Print handouts: extra copies of “Class Outline and Reading List” and “Character Profiles” for newcomers.
4. Assign Scripture reader. Those playing the character of Sosthenes or Chloe would be especially appropriate choices to read the assigned portion of 1 Corinthians from a modern translation. (I recommend the New Living Bible, New International Version, or New Revised Standard Version.) Ask them to prepare in advance. Most effective is printing the text to be read as a letter, perhaps even in scroll format.

CLASS OUTLINE:

1. Open with prayer for enlightenment.
2. Distribute Character Profiles to anyone who is new or has forgotten their character, and allow a few minutes to get familiar with them.
3. Form discussion groups of four or five persons, no two with the same character. Introduce yourself by name and two or three important facts (e.g., “My name is Suria. I am a slave and a midwife and I have important spiritual gifts.”) It will be better to form new discussion groups for each session so that all participants get exposed to the full range of people in the church.
4. Background: Read or share in your own words “Shame and Honor” (Commentary, pp. 368–69).
5. Invite the assigned reader to read 1 Cor 1:18-31 while others listen from the perspective of their character. Don't follow along in your Bible; the Corinthians received the letter orally.
6. Discuss in small groups: From the perspective of your character, how do you feel about what Paul says about who is honored and who is shamed in God's eyes and in the church?
7. Discuss in small group or whole group, not in character: Do we who follow Jesus hold the same honor/shame values as non-Christians? What values do we reverse? (1 Cor 1:27-28; see “Reversed Status” Commentary, p. 87).
8. If time permits, read and discuss “Image Consciousness” (Commentary, p. 89) or “God's Preference for the ‘Foolish, . . . Weak, . . . Low, and Despised’” (Commentary, pp. 89–90).
9. Close in prayer for the grace to live into God's will, both individually and as a body of believers.

Session 4: Sex Gets Us into Trouble

1 Corinthians 5–6

The Corinthians were messed up with incest, prostitution, and arguments about sexual ethics. What are our issues, and how do we deal with them?

PREPARATION:

1. Read the lesson outline and plan any adjustments necessary for your group.
2. Read the Scripture (1 Cor 5-6) and Commentary, pp. 131–69.
3. Print handouts: special handout “Sexuality: God’s Gift” and also extra copies of “Class Outline and Reading List” and “Character Profiles” for newcomers.
4. Assign Scripture reader. Those playing the character of Sosthenes or Chloe would be especially appropriate choices to read the assigned portion of 1 Corinthians from a modern translation. (I recommend the New Living Bible, New International Version or New Revised Standard Version.) Ask them to prepare in advance. Most effective is printing the text to be read as a letter, perhaps even in scroll format.

CLASS OUTLINE:

1. Open with prayer for enlightenment.
2. Distribute Character Profiles to anyone who is new or has forgotten their character, and allow a few minutes to get familiar with them.
3. Form discussion groups of four or five persons, no two with the same character. Introduce yourself by name and two or three important facts (e.g., “My name is Suria. I am a slave and a midwife and I have important spiritual gifts.”) It will be better to form new discussion groups for each session so that all participants get exposed to the full range of people in the church.
4. Background: Summarize “Vice and Virtue Lists” (Commentary, pp. 370–71).
5. The assigned reader reads 1 Cor 5:9-13; 6:12-20 while others listen from the perspective of their character. Don’t follow along in your Bible; the Corinthians received the letter orally.
6. Discuss in small groups: From the perspective of your character, does following Jesus affect your sexual behavior? How?
7. Discuss in small groups: From the perspective of your character, do you think Paul has a right to tell you how to behave sexually?
8. Discuss in small group or whole group, not in character: What are the most important sexual issues for Christians? (You may want to brainstorm a long list and have class members privately and anonymously write down the top three issues. Have someone add up the results and report back.) What is the meaning and purpose of sexual relations?
9. Distribute handout “Sexuality in Christ” (see handouts, below; taken from Commentary, pp. 167–69). Read and discuss.
10. Close in prayer for the grace to live into God’s will, both individually and as a body of believers.

Session 5: Singleness and Marriage

1 Corinthians 7

The Corinthian Christians were divided on their understanding of whether and when marriage appropriate and on their feelings about sexuality within marriage. So are we. Is there anything we can learn from Paul's response to the Corinthians' questions?

PREPARATION:

1. Read the lesson outline and plan any adjustments necessary for your group.
2. Read the Scripture (1 Cor 7) and Commentary, pp. 170–91.
3. Print handouts: extra copies of “Class Outline and Reading List” and “Character Profiles” for newcomers.
4. Assign Scripture reader. Those playing the character of Sosthenes or Chloe would be especially appropriate choices to read the assigned portion of 1 Corinthians from a modern translation. (I recommend the New Living Bible, New International Version, or New Revised Standard Version.) Ask them to prepare in advance. Most effective is printing the text to be read as a letter, perhaps even in scroll format.

CLASS OUTLINE:

1. Open with prayer for enlightenment.
2. Distribute Character Profiles to anyone who is new or has forgotten their character, and allow a few minutes to get familiar with them.
3. Form discussion groups of four or five persons, no two with the same character. Introduce yourself by name and two or three important facts (e.g., “My name is Suria. I am a slave and a midwife and I have important spiritual gifts.”) It will be better to form new discussion groups for each session so that all participants get exposed to the full range of people in the church.
4. Background: read “Who Told Paul What? What the Corinthians wrote” (Commentary, pp. 372–73 up to the end of 2. “What should we do with them” (7:25-40)?”).
5. Background on marriage and sexuality in first-century Corinth. Use the following notes and supplement them by reading from sites such as <http://www.roman-empire.net/society/soc-marriage.html>, or <http://www.womenintheancientworld.com/marriageinancientrome.htm>.
 - A woman's sexual behavior reflected honor or shame on her men.
 - Ethical teaching dealt only with men's behavior (mostly permissive).
 - Women were sexual objects, not subjects.
 - Marriage was not necessarily for love, but love was not absent.
 - The Roman goal for marriage was peace and concord, not love and happiness.
 - Divorce was readily available.
 - Slaves generally could not marry.
6. The assigned reader reads 1 Cor 7:1-24 while others listen from the perspective of their characters. Don't follow along in your Bible; the Corinthians received the letter orally.
7. Discuss in small groups: From the perspective of your character, what do you think about marriage and sex? What do you think of what Paul wrote?
8. Overview of chapter 7
 - Chapter 7 addresses several aspects of singleness and marriage.
 - 7:1-7 To the married, Paul writes “enjoy sexual union.”

- 7:8-9 To the formerly married, he writes, “be celibate or remarry.”
7:10-16 To the married, he writes, “don’t initiate divorce.”
7:17-38 To the engaged, he writes that “marriage is good, but it is not the highest good.”
7:39-40 In a final word to widows and widowers, he restates that both singleness and marriage are good.

7 Lessons from 1 Cor 7:

1st lesson: Celibate singleness is a good option.

2nd lesson: Sex within marriage is good.

3rd lesson: Wives and husbands have the same rights and responsibilities.

4th lesson: Remarriage of widow(er)s is OK.

5th lesson: Avoid divorce, don’t initiate it.

6th lesson: Marriage takes work and commitment (it causes “distress” [v. 28] and “anxiety” [vv. 32-35]).

7th lesson: Marriage and singleness are contexts and resources for serving God.

9. Discuss in small groups or whole group:
- What could our congregation do to support and honor those who are single (never married, divorced, or widowed)?
 - What could our congregation do to help people honor God and experience the blessings of sexuality?
 - What could we do to help people find healing and hope who have been messed up by bad sexual understandings, attitudes, or experiences? (These could be libertine understandings or attitudes and promiscuous experiences for some, and for others they could be restrictive understandings or attitudes and abusive experiences.)
10. Close in prayer for the grace to live into God’s will, both individually and as a body of believers.

Session 6: Tainted Food and Other Social Dilemmas

1 Corinthians 8, 10

Most of us may not think much about “food offered to idols” (though our Christian sisters and brothers in other parts of the world think about this). In fact, we may not think much at all about the ways in which the expectations and ordinary activities of life conflict with or detract from our faithful following of Jesus. And, like the Corinthians, we may look down on those whose conscience is stricter or those whose conscience is looser than our own on such matters.

PREPARATION:

1. Read the lesson outline and plan any adjustments necessary for your group.
2. Read the Scripture (1 Cor 8, 10) and Commentary, pp. 192–206, 217–38.
3. Print handouts: extra copies of “Class Outline and Reading List” and “Character Profiles” for newcomers.
4. Assign Scripture reader. Those playing the character of Sosthenes or Chloe would be especially appropriate choices to read the assigned portion of 1 Corinthians from a modern translation. (I recommend the New Living Bible, New International Version, or New Revised Standard Version.) Ask them to prepare in advance. Most effective is printing the text to be read as a letter, perhaps even in scroll format.

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4. Background: Read excerpts from Introduction, Corinth (Commentary, p. 23, last three paragraphs, beginning at “Within the city”) and Explanatory Notes on 8:1-6 (Commentary, pp. 194–95, ending at “assuming that Paul would side with them”).
5. The assigned reader reads 1 Cor 8:1-13; 10:23-24, 31-32 while others listen from the perspective of their character. Don’t follow along in your Bible; the Corinthians received the letter orally.
6. Discuss in small groups: From the perspective of your character, do you think it is okay to eat meat that has been dedicated to the honor of Asclepius, Aphrodite, or other gods? What makes you think that?
7. Summarize the Explanatory Notes on 1 Cor 8:7-13 (Commentary, pp. 197–200) and read or summarize “The Weak” (Commentary, pp. 200–201).
8. Discuss in small groups: From the perspective of your character, which persons in your discussion group are “weak” by Paul’s definition, and which are “strong?” How do you feel about your status?
9. Summarize “The Risks of Knowledge” (Commentary, pp. 204–206).

10. Discuss in small groups or whole group, not in character: How do you balance “knowledge” and “love” in your life, in your relationships with other people (family, neighbors, strangers), and in your congregation?

[Alternative to 9 and 10: Read and discuss the quotation from Pope Francis, including the paragraph before and the paragraph after (Commentary, pp. 203–204). If you choose to do this, print and distribute the quotation from the handout collection below.)

11. Close with prayer for the grace to live into God’s will, both individually and as a body of believers.

Session 7: Claiming Rights

1 Corinthians 9

The Western world places a high value on personal freedom and on “inalienable rights.” Paul voluntarily gave up some of his rights and encouraged others to do so. Some people were offended by his refusal to claim and defend his rights. Is Paul’s example relevant to the struggle for our rights?

PREPARATION:

1. Read the lesson outline and plan any adjustments necessary for your group.
2. Read the Scripture (1 Cor 9) and Commentary, pp. 207–16.
3. Print handouts: extra copies of “Class Outline and Reading List” and “Character Profiles” for newcomers.
4. Assign Scripture reader. Those playing the character of Sosthenes or Chloe would be especially appropriate choices to read the assigned portion of 1 Corinthians from a modern translation. (I recommend the New Living Bible, New International Version, or New Revised Standard Version.) Ask them to prepare in advance. Most effective is printing the text to be read as a letter, perhaps even in scroll format.

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4. Background: Read or share in your own way “Patrons and Clients” (Commentary, pp. 366–67) and excerpt from Explanatory Notes on 9:3-15 (Commentary, p. 209, from “What options were available” to p. 210, “his suitability as a leader and teacher”).
5. The assigned reader reads chapter 9 while others listen from the perspective of their character. Don’t follow along in your Bible; the Corinthians received the letter orally.
6. Discuss in small groups: From the perspective of your character, what do you think of Paul’s refusal to accept financial support? What do you think he should have done to meet his living expenses?
7. Read “Financial Support for Ministers” (Commentary, pp. 214–15).
8. Discuss in small groups, not in character: What is the best way to determine how much we should pay our pastor(s)? Besides paying an adequate salary, how can we support our pastor(s) (and their families)?
9. Read “Individual Rights” (Commentary, pp. 232–33).
10. Discuss in small groups or whole group, not in character: how should followers of Jesus balance defending their rights and voluntarily giving up their rights? How is giving up rights different from having your rights taken away? How is defending my rights different from defending the rights of others who are oppressed or vulnerable? (In addition to chapter 9, you may wish to refer to 6:12 and 10:23.)
11. Close with prayer for the grace to live into God’s will, both individually and as a body of believers.

Session 8: Offending Each Other in Worship

1 Corinthians 11

What is it about worship that divides God's people? In Corinth, it was spiritual one-upmanship and concern about controlling the chaos, including questions about how women conduct themselves. Inequities at fellowship meals and misbehavior at communion were issues. We wouldn't do anything like that, would we?

PREPARATION:

1. Read the lesson outline and plan any adjustments necessary for your group.
2. Read the Scripture (1 Corinthians 11) and Commentary, pp. 239–68.
3. Print handouts: extra copies of “Class Outline and Reading List” and “Character Profiles” for newcomers.
4. Assign Scripture reader. Those playing the character of Sosthenes or Chloe would be especially appropriate choices to read the assigned portion of 1 Corinthians from a modern translation. (I recommend the New Living Bible, New International Version, or New Revised Standard Version.) Ask them to prepare in advance. Most effective is printing the text to be read as a letter, perhaps even in scroll format.

CLASS OUTLINE:

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3. Form discussion groups of four or five persons, no two with the same character. Introduce yourself by name and two or three important facts (e.g., “My name is Suria. I am a slave and a midwife and I have important spiritual gifts.”) It will be better to form new discussion groups for each session so that all participants get exposed to the full range of people in the church.
4. Background: Read or share in your own way Exegetical Notes on Insensitive Behavior at the Lord's Supper 11:20-22 (Commentary, pp. 254–55, ending with “meals hosted by wealthy patrons in other settings”).
5. The assigned reader reads 1 Cor 11:17-34 while others listen from the perspective of their character. Don't follow along in your Bible; the Corinthians received the letter orally.
6. Discuss in small groups: From the perspective of your character, do you overeat at fellowship meals or are you left out? How do you feel about that? How does it affect your relationship with others in your congregation?
7. Summarize “Discerning ‘the Body’ 11:27-32” (Commentary, pp. 258–59, ending at “the participants *eat and drink judgment against themselves* (v. 29)”) and read “Divisions at the Lord's Supper” (Commentary, p. 265).
8. Discuss in small groups, not in character: Who would not be welcome or who might not think they are welcome when our congregation celebrates the Lord's Supper? Do we do a good job of “discerning the Body of Christ” in our communion?
9. Optional: Invite small groups to report to the whole group and continue the conversation.
10. Close in prayer for the grace to live into God's will, both individually and as a body of believers.

Session 9: Body Image

1 Corinthians 12:12–13:13

Like others in his time, Paul used the metaphor of a body to talk about the community of faith. The image is useful for thinking about how people are connected to each other. But the vocabulary also reminds us that poor body image is an issue for many people. How does that help us to think about the church?

PREPARATION:

1. Read the lesson outline and plan any adjustments necessary for your group.
2. Read the Scripture (1 Cor 12:12-13:13) and Commentary, pp. 276–97.
3. Print handouts: extra copies of “Class Outline and Reading List” and “Character Profiles” for newcomers.
4. Assign Scripture reader. Those playing the character of Sosthenes or Chloe would be especially appropriate choices to read the assigned portion of 1 Corinthians from a modern translation. (I recommend the New Living Bible, New International Version, or New Revised Standard Version.) Ask them to prepare in advance. Most effective is printing the text to be read as a letter, perhaps even in scroll format.

CLASS OUTLINE:

1. Open with prayer for enlightenment.
2. Distribute Character Profiles to anyone who is new or has forgotten their character, and allow a few minutes to get familiar with them.
3. Form discussion groups of four or five persons, no two with the same character. Introduce yourself by name and two or three important facts (e.g., “My name is Suria. I am a slave and a midwife and I have important spiritual gifts.”) It will be better to form new discussion groups for each session so that all participants get exposed to the full range of people in the church.
4. Background: Summarize “Bodies in 1 Corinthians” (Commentary, pp. 363–64).
5. The assigned reader reads 1 Cor 12:12-27 while others listen from the perspective of their character. Don’t follow along in your Bible; the Corinthians received the letter orally.
6. Discuss in small groups: From the perspective of your character, do you feel like part of the body of believers in Corinth? Which body part do you identify with? How do you feel about the other body parts in the fellowship?
7. Read “Body Image Issues” (Commentary, pp. 382–83).
8. Discuss in small groups, not in character: Do some Christians have issues with their spiritual body image? Do we? What parts of our spiritual body (congregation or denomination or all who call themselves Christians) are we ashamed of?
9. The assigned reader reads 1 Cor 12:31b-13:13.
10. Discuss in small groups or in whole group: What characteristics of love are most difficult for us, or me, to practice toward fellow Christians?
11. Close with prayer for the grace to live into God’s will, both individually and as a body of believers.

Session 10: Competitive Spirituality

1 Corinthians 12:1-11, 27-31a; 14:1-40

Are you a “spiritual” person? Are you more spiritual than others? Some Christians in Corinth were quite competitive about their claims of spiritual maturity. Paul challenged them to develop spiritual practices that would build up the body of believers.

PREPARATION:

1. Read the lesson outline and plan any adjustments necessary for your group.
2. Read the Scripture (1 Cor 12–14) and Commentary, pp. 269–76, 298–318.
3. Print handouts: extra copies of “Class Outline and Reading List” and “Character Profiles” for newcomers.
4. Assign Scripture reader. Those playing the character of Sosthenes or Chloe would be especially appropriate choices to read the assigned portion of 1 Corinthians from a modern translation. (I recommend the New Living Bible, New International Version, or New Revised Standard Version.) Ask them to prepare in advance. Most effective is printing the text to be read as a letter, perhaps even in scroll format.

CLASS OUTLINE:

1. Open with prayer for enlightenment.
2. Distribute Character Profiles to anyone who is new or has forgotten their character, and allow a few minutes to get familiar with them.
3. Form discussion groups of four or five persons, no two with the same character. Introduce yourself by name and two or three important facts (e.g., “My name is Suria. I am a slave and a midwife and I have important spiritual gifts.”) It will be better to form new discussion groups for each session so that all participants get exposed to the full range of people in the church.
4. Background: Read or summarize “Spirituality” (Commentary, pp. 369–70). Explain why the Commentary speaks of “manifestations of the Holy Spirit” instead of “spiritual gifts” (Commentary, pp. 270–72, to the end of the first paragraph).
5. The assigned reader reads 1 Cor 12:1-11, 28-31a, changing the first line to read “Now concerning spiritual matters” (see Commentary, p. 271) while others listen from the perspective of their character. Don’t follow along in your Bible; the Corinthians received the letter orally.
6. Discuss in small groups: From the perspective of your character, which manifestations of the Spirit do you most value? Which manifestations get the most recognition in the assembly?
7. Summarize “Spiritual Elitism” (Commentary, pp. 97–98: although written in response to 2:1-3:4 it is also relevant here) and, if time permits, “Two Kinds of People” (Commentary, p. 99).
8. Discuss in small groups, not in character: How is the Holy Spirit manifested in our (individual and collective) worship, relationships, behavior? (perhaps with reference to “Spiritual Manifestations Today” Commentary, pp. 281–82; cf. pp. 313–15).
9. The assigned reader reads 1 Cor 14:26-33a, 37-40.
10. Discuss in small groups or in whole group: How does our practice of corporate worship compare with what Paul is describing? (It may be helpful to summarize the main points—or the points most relevant to your congregation—of “The Practice of Worship” (Commentary, pp. 309–12), but make sure there is time for the conversation.)
11. Close with prayer for the grace to live into God’s will, both individually and as a body of believers.

Session 11: What Gives Us Hope?

1 Corinthians 15

In spite of all the conflicts and differences, there is a big picture that pulls us together: Jesus' resurrection and ours. Some of the Corinthian Christians didn't really believe in the resurrection. Do we?

PREPARATION:

1. Read the lesson outline and plan any adjustments necessary for your group.
2. Read the Scripture (1 Corinthians 15) and Commentary, pp. 319–44.
3. Print handouts: extra copies of “Class Outline and Reading List” and “Character Profiles” for newcomers.
4. Assign Scripture reader. Those playing the character of Sosthenes or Chloe would be especially appropriate choices to read the assigned portion of 1 Corinthians from a modern translation. (I recommend the New Living Bible, New International Version, or New Revised Standard Version.) Ask them to prepare in advance. Most effective is printing the text to be read as a letter, perhaps even in scroll format.

CLASS OUTLINE:

1. Open with prayer for enlightenment.
2. Distribute Character Profiles to anyone who is new or has forgotten their character, and allow a few minutes to get familiar with them.
3. Form discussion groups of four or five persons, no two with the same character. Introduce yourself by name and two or three important facts (e.g., “My name is Suria. I am a slave and a midwife and I have important spiritual gifts.”) It will be better to form new discussion groups for each session so that all participants get exposed to the full range of people in the church.
4. Background: Read or share in your own words the following quotation from Reta Halteman Finger and George D. McClain, *Creating a Scene in Corinth* (pp. 184–85).

We know from the Gospels that Palestinian Jews at this time do not hold a uniform belief about physical resurrection (i.e., Matthew 22:23–33). The same would be true of Jews in the Diaspora. But at least since the Maccabean Revolt in the second century BCE, some Jews hold to bodily resurrection as vindication of faithfulness to Yahweh's law (i.e., Daniel 12:2–3). As followers of Peter, who had seen the resurrected Jesus, the Jewish faction in Chloe's house church would surely embrace a view similar to Paul's.

Probably the majority of Greco-Romans believe in no afterlife at all. A common inscription on a tombstone is “I was not, I am not, I care not”—used so often the Latin is abbreviated to NGNSNC.

However, this is not universal. Since the time of Socrates and Plato, the concept of body/soul dualism would have also circulated in some form. “The soul lives forever, it is what gives life, and it has come down from God,” writes one father on his son's tombstone. “The body is the soul's tunic.” Even some philosophers may have held to such platonic views at this time.

Among the masses, popular myths since Homer's time held that the dead live a shadowy existence in Hades. And when some Corinthians hear Paul speak of believers rising from the dead, they may have thought of the god Asclepius, son of Apollo, whose healing center was in their midst and who had a reputation of restoring the dead to life. Others may have dabbled in magic; some of the magical papyri of that time do speak of conjuring up the dead.

But the educated, elite classes scorn ideas about bodily afterlife as ignorant and disgusting, like “resuscitating a corpse.” Plutarch, a second-century Roman writer, discusses the range of beliefs about what happens after death. He rejects the popular notion that the “lower status...[physical] body could possibly attain the high status reserved for the more subtle, purer substances of the self.”

Thus we can see that less-educated people who believe in such myths and magic would have found it easier to accept Paul’s doctrine of bodily resurrection, even if Paul’s Jewish eschatology implies something very different.”

5. The assigned reader reads 1 Cor 15:1-20, 29-44, 50-58 while others listen from the perspective of their character. Don’t follow along in your Bible; the Corinthians received the letter orally.
6. Discuss in small groups: From the perspective of your character, does Paul’s teaching give you hope? Does it embarrass you? Is it confusing? What do you think happens to people when they die?
7. If your group is not familiar with the Bible’s teaching on resurrection the leader or some other class member should read or summarize “Resurrection of the Dead” (Commentary, pp. 338–40). Take time for questions and discussion in the full group.
8. Read “The Absence of Resurrection Hope amongst Christians” (Commentary, pp. 340–41).
9. Discuss in small groups, not in character: What influences shape your understanding of resurrection and life after death?
10. Discuss in small groups, not in character: How does your understanding of resurrection affect your life?
11. Optional: discuss the questions above in the whole group.
12. Close in prayer for the grace to live into God’s will, both individually and as a body of believers; include v. 58 as a blessing.

Session 12: Taking Care of Business

1 Corinthians 16

As Paul draws this letter to a close, he quickly deals with some logistical details. These include plans for travel and instructions for gathering and delivering money for the poor. Then there are the final greetings. At the end of our study of 1 Corinthians, what are the matters we need to attend to?

PREPARATION:

1. Read the lesson outline and plan any adjustments necessary for your group.
2. Read the Scripture (1 Corinthians 16) and Commentary, pp. 345–58.
3. Print handouts: extra copies of “Class Outline and Reading List” and “Character Profiles” for newcomers.
4. Assign Scripture reader. Those playing the character of Sosthenes or Chloe would be especially appropriate choices to read the assigned portion of 1 Corinthians from a modern translation. (I recommend the New Living Bible, New International Version, or New Revised Standard Version.) Ask them to prepare in advance. Most effective is printing the text to be read as a letter, perhaps even in scroll format.

CLASS OUTLINE:

1. Open with prayer for enlightenment.
2. Distribute Character Profiles to anyone who is new or has forgotten their character, and allow a few minutes to get familiar with them.
3. Form discussion groups of four or five persons, no two with the same character. Introduce yourself by name and two or three important facts (e.g., “My name is Suria. I am a slave and a midwife and I have important spiritual gifts.”) It will be better to form new discussion groups for each session so that all participants get exposed to the full range of people in the church.
4. The assigned reader reads 1 Cor 16:1–4 while others listen from the perspective of their character. Don’t follow along in your Bible; the Corinthians received the letter orally.
5. Discuss in small groups: From the perspective of your character, how do you feel about Paul’s appeal for donations to the church in Jerusalem? How will you respond?
6. If giving is an issue in your congregation or study group, take time to teach from “The Collection for the Poor” (Commentary, pp. 352–54), especially the second half on almsgiving. Or it may be more important to teach from “Systematic Giving and Responsible Management of Charitable Gifts” (Commentary, pp. 354–55). Include time for discussion.
7. The assigned reader reads 1 Cor 16:5–24 while others listen from the perspective of their character. Don’t follow along in your Bible; the Corinthians received the letter orally.
8. Discuss in small groups: From the perspective of your character, how do you feel about a) Timothy coming to Corinth now; b) Apollos not coming to Corinth at this time; c) Paul coming to Corinth next spring?
9. Discuss in the full group: How have your understandings of Paul and of the Christians in Corinth changed through this study?
10. Discuss in the full group, not in character: Of the issues we have discussed in this study, what do we (our study group or our congregation) need to keep working on?
11. Read “Love the Church” (Commentary, pp. 358–59).
12. Close with prayer for the grace to live into God’s will, both individually and as a body of believers.

Handouts

1. Class Outline and Reading List: Insert the dates for your study and give copies of this to class members so they can prepare for each session. You might print this on one side and a Character Profile on the other side for each participant. For convenience of printing, this is set up as a double-page spread.

2. Handout for Session 4, “Sexuality: God’s Gift”

For convenience of printing, this is set up as a double-page spread.

3. Handout for Session 6, alternative discussion, “Pope Francis’s Statement on the Idolatry of Money”

For convenience of printing, this is set up as a double-page spread.

4. Character Profiles

The twelve Character Profiles can be photocopied for participants to use in their roles in the discussion. Some of them have names of people known to have been Corinthian believers (Commentary, pp. 28–29). The details are compiled from things we know about the city and the church.

If the group is smaller than twelve people, select representative characters. If there are more than twelve, make multiple copies. Ideally, participants should retain the same character for the duration of the study. If that is not possible, Character Profiles can be distributed at the beginning of each session with several minutes given to read and “get into” the assigned roles.

**COMMUNITY AND CONFLICT:
Realities of the Church in Corinth and in Our
Congregation**

A Twelve-Session Interactive Study of 1 Corinthians

This study is anchored in *1 Corinthians* by Dan Nighswander (Believers Church Bible Commentary, Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2017). Study participants are encouraged to purchase this commentary and to read the relevant portions for each class.

Class Outline and Preparatory Reading Guide

- _____ Getting Oriented (1 Cor 1:1-9)
- _____ Power and Conflict (1 Cor 1:10-17; 4:1-21)
- _____ Conflicting Values (1 Cor 1:18-3:23)
- _____ Sex Gets Us into Trouble (1 Cor 5-6)
- _____ Singleness and Marriage (1 Cor 7)
- _____ Tainted Food and Other Social Dilemmas (1 Cor 8, 10)
- _____ Claiming Rights (1 Cor 9)
- _____ Offending Each Other in Worship (1 Cor 11)
- _____ Body Image (1 Cor 12:12-13:13)
- _____ Competitive Spirituality (1 Cor 12, 14)
- _____ What Gives Us Hope? (1 Cor 15)
- _____ Taking Care of Business (1 Cor 16)

As a participant in this study, you will receive a Character Profile that defines your role as a Corinthian follower of Jesus for discussion purposes. Please enter into this as much as you can. Check out the recommended websites and do further research to enrich your understanding of your role and the larger context of the Christian fellowship in Corinth.

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- _____ What Gives Us Hope? (1 Cor 15)
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Sexuality: God's Gift

(Community and Conflict: Sex Gets Us into Trouble 1 Cor 5-6)

In the lead chapter of *Sexuality: God's Gift* (2nd ed. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2010), Anne Krabill Hershberger and Willard S. Krabill suggest the following seven "foundation stones" for a healthy acceptance and enjoyment of this gift:

1. A proper theology of the body accepts the physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions as parts of who we are and recognizes them as a gift from God.
2. A proper sexual theology based on the Bible's "affirmation of gender differences [is] a blessing from God when we allow love to permeate our relationships, and a sense that each individual is valuable as a sexual person."
3. Respect for males and females honors both as equal and valued.
4. Integration of sex and life recognizes that we are always sexual beings and that sexuality is expressed not only in sex but in all aspects of relationships.
5. The sexuality of all people is affirmed, including those who are celibate, disabled, and seniors.
6. Sound sex education from parents, the faith community, and schools helps children understand the impact of their sexual decisions and instills a realistic and positive body image.
7. Celebration of sex practices the great commandments: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind"; and . . . 'love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matt 22:37, 39).

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POPE FRANCIS'S STATEMENT ON THE IDOLATRY OF MONEY:

(Community and Conflict: Tainted food and other social dilemmas
1 Cor 8, 10)

One cause of [the economy of exclusion] is found in our relationship with money, since we calmly accept its dominion over ourselves and our societies. The current financial crisis can make us overlook the fact that it originated in a profound human crisis: the denial of the primacy of the human person! We have created new idols. The worship of the ancient golden calf (cf. Ex 32:1-35) has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the idolatry of money and the dictatorship of an impersonal economy lacking a truly human purpose. The worldwide crisis affecting finance and the economy lays bare their imbalances and, above all, their lack of real concern for human beings; [people are] reduced to one of [their] needs alone: consumption.

While the earnings of a minority are growing exponentially, so too is the gap separating the majority from the prosperity enjoyed by those happy few. This imbalance is the result of ideologies which defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace and financial speculation. Consequently, they reject the right of states, charged with vigilance for the common good, to exercise any form of control. A new tyranny is thus born, invisible and often virtual, which unilaterally and relentlessly imposes its own laws and rules. Debt and the accumulation of interest also make it difficult for countries to realize the potential of their own economies and keep citizens from enjoying their real purchasing power. To all this we can add widespread corruption and self-serving tax evasion, which have taken on worldwide dimensions. The thirst for power and possessions knows no limits. In this system, which tends to devour everything which stands in the way of increased profits, whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenseless before the interests of a deified market, which become the only rule. (Francis I, *Evangelii Gaudium*, §§55-56)

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Achalcus (male, age 35; see 1 Cor 16:17)

You were born a free man, and at a young age you began working in the famous Corinthian bronze manufacturing industry. The work is hard, and you welcome breaks from it, especially for the Isthmian Games and for religious festivals. You have never embraced any particular religion, but you have attended all the public festivals.

Stephanas is a dealer in bronze with whom you often work. He invited you to his home to hear about a new religion that he had recently joined. You met Paul there and were convinced by his preaching about Jesus, so you too were baptized. This has changed your life. You are especially delighted with the ability to speak in tongues that you received soon after your baptism, and you do this often because it strengthens your faith and makes you feel close to God.

Because it was Paul who introduced you to Jesus, you continue to be loyal to him. Also, his experience as a tradesman, his down-to-earth way of talking, and his understanding of people like you are strong connections with your life. Because Paul is unmarried, you have decided not to marry. In fact, you think it would be better for all Jesus-followers not to marry. And you look down on those who consort with prostitutes, especially in pagan temples, because Christians should practice sexual constraint and abstinence.

Paul's teaching about resurrection is very attractive to you, because your life is difficult and you hope that after death you may experience God's reward to compensate for your troubles.

You sometimes accompany Stephanas in his business travels, and since you were going with him and Fortunatus to Ephesus, you helped to deliver a letter to Paul as an official representative of the assembly in Corinth.

(See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corinthian_bronze, and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isthmian_Games)

Chloe (female, age 40; see 1 Cor 1:10)

You are a businesswoman. You export goods abroad, and you have employees and connections in Ephesus and other cities. Your home in Corinth is an apartment above the shop where you work, but it is large enough to host a small fellowship of followers of Jesus.

You are a widow and childless. Although you have had prospects to remarry, you are unsure about it. Would it disrupt your financial security? Would it disrupt your intention to follow Jesus, especially if you married a non-Christian?

You formerly explored other faiths, especially the Eleusinian Mysteries, in which you connected with spiritual forces and were free to express yourself as a woman. Now in the Christian assembly you continue to speak out and have been recognized as a prophet. Sometimes you speak in tongues or interpret when others do. You have good spiritual insight, but you have not been fully accepted as a leader by the male leaders in Corinthian Christian fellowships.

You have been deeply impacted by Paul's ministry and consider him a friend as well as a spiritual mentor.

You know what is going on—you are discrete about who you share things with, and people tell you their sad and embarrassing stories.

(See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_ancient_Rome, and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eleusinian_Mysteries)

Crispus (male, age 40; see 1 Cor 1:14; Acts 18:8, 17)

You are a successful businessman whose business requires you to travel. You are married and have five young children and many slaves. Your whole household became followers of Jesus when you embraced that faith.

You are a Jew and were formerly a synagogue official and patron (i.e., “major donor”). Your conversion to Christianity earned you a beating. You are still at odds with the members of the synagogue who attacked you. Now you exercise your leadership among the followers of Jesus and carry considerable influence with them. You are a man of high honor.

You know the Hebrew Scriptures and are sensitive to any new interpretation or to dropping the Jewish religious practices. Although it was Paul who introduced you to Jesus, the preaching of Cephas appeals to you more than Paul’s nontraditional message. But one of the new practices that you do embrace is speaking in tongues. You have found this to be spiritually freeing, and it enhances your awareness of God’s presence in your life.

You never were comfortable with emperor-worship or the many gods and goddesses of pagan worship. You carefully practice kosher food laws and avoid eating meat that has been dedicated in a temple. You are suspicious of some other church members who are less rigorous in their spiritual practices or their morality.

Having been raised in the Pharisaic tradition, you believe in resurrection from the dead.

(See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imperial_cult_\(ancient_Rome\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imperial_cult_(ancient_Rome)), and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hellenistic_Judaism)

Erastus (male, age 55; see Rom 16:23)

You are a financial official of the city with considerable influence. You travel widely as part of your civic responsibilities and are well-connected politically and socially.

You have substantial wealth—you even made a public gift of a section of pavement. You have a very nice house, in which you host a fellowship of Jesus-followers. You are a patron with many clients.

You are committed to following Jesus but have no qualms about doing whatever is expected of a person with your public role, including declaring that Caesar is God and doing business with people of questionable ethics. You understand how the system works and are skilled at working it. Besides, you know that “An idol is nothing at all in the world” and that “There is no God but one.” You enjoy attending social functions in temples, with the camaraderie, good food and wine, and entertainment—though since you became a follower of Jesus, you aren’t comfortable staying late when the sex slaves arrive and the party becomes an orgy.

You have been well-educated and value education, including rhetorical training and communication skill. Paul’s ability in public speaking is limited, but Apollo does very well and you enjoy listening to him. When Apollo is in town you like to invite friends to the worship gathering to hear him speak. When your friends are present, you are uncomfortable with some of the ecstatic utterances and behavior in worship.

It still feels awkward for you to share in fellowship meals and the Lord’s Supper with your slaves, though they expect it. Your wife, who is not a believer, scoffs at the practice of sharing meals with lower class people.

(See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patronage_in_ancient_Rome, and <http://www.mycrandall.ca/courses/pauline/images/Erastus.htm>)

Euporas (female, age 25)

You were born a free woman, the daughter of a farmer. But when the crops failed two years in a row, the debts piled up and you were sold into slavery to make it up. Since then you have been a maid in the house of Phoebe in the village of Cenchræe. Your mistress has taken up with the followers of Jesus, though your master has not.

As a child, you often heard your father talk about various philosophers he admired. They were all of the Stoic school. When your mistress invited you to join the assembly in her house to listen to the Jesus-follower, Apollos, you were impressed by the parallels between Apollos and the Stoic philosophers in their manner of speech and their teaching.

In a short time, you too were persuaded to believe in Jesus and to follow his ethics. Some things that people say in the assembly meetings don't make sense, but that's because they don't understand the philosophy of Jesus. Either that, or they don't have the rhetorical skill to express themselves well.

One thing that troubles you in the believers' assemblies is the way some of the women behave: speaking out loudly, sometimes speaking ecstatically in incoherent "tongues," uncovering their heads and dancing with abandon.

You would like to get married if you could find a free man who would take you as a wife and buy your freedom. But as you get older, the likelihood of that is getting smaller. At one time you thought that Achaicus might become your husband, but he says he has no interest in marriage. In fact, he thinks that it is better for people not to marry, and he has spoken out in the assembly against those who do. He says that even those who are married should abstain from sexual intimacy.

(See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_ancient_Rome, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavery_in_ancient_Rome, and <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stoicism>)

Fortunatus (male, age 35; see 1 Cor 16:17)

You were born a slave on a farm near Corinth. As a young man you showed promise in management and you were purchased by Stephanas to oversee his export business. Your common-law wife is also a slave in the same household, as are your children.

Once you injured your leg in a work-related accident. As it took a long time to heal, you went to the Temple of Asclepius. There you underwent a purification and made an offering. After you reported your dreams to the priest, he prescribed a treatment that eased your pain but did not completely heal you.

Through the teaching of a preacher named Paul, Stephanas became convinced that Jesus is the fulfillment of the hope of the Jews like himself. All the slaves in your household automatically became followers of Jesus when your master did. You have now come to love and worship Jesus of your own will. You like the believers who gather to worship at Stephanas's house, but those who meet in other houses live in ways that you think are inappropriate for followers of Jesus.

You accompany Stephanas in his business travels, and since you were going with him and Achaicus to Ephesus, you helped to deliver a letter to Paul as an official representative of the assembly in Corinth. You look forward to hearing how he answers the questions about marriage, resurrection, eating food dedicated to idols, and about the offering he has asked us to gather for the believers in Jerusalem.

You have admired Paul, but as a manager of the household you are puzzled by his insistence on earning his own living instead of accepting financial patrons. You aren't sure that Paul can be trusted with large sums of money.

(See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavery_in_ancient_Rome, and <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asclepeion>)

Kalandria (female, age 25)

You are a widow who is struggling to support yourself by working in the shop in the meat market. Although the pay is very low, you do have the advantage of being able to eat the unsavory cuts of meat that are unsold at the end of the day. Your parents were slaves, but you obtained your freedom. That gives you some independence, but it also means that you do not receive the protection and provision of a mistress. You are seeking a husband who will help to improve your economic situation and your social status. In the meantime, your young children are being raised by your sister's family on a farm, and you rarely see them.

You once found comfort and encouragement in worshipping Isis, who serves especially the needs of women. But the cost of participating in the cult was high for a poor woman.

Recently you were introduced to people who worship the God of the Jews by following Jesus. It seemed strange to follow a man who was crucified, but you were drawn to the people. Some of their practices remind you of Isis practices.

Apollo has explained what it means to live as a believer, and you are impressed by his persuasive arguments. There was an earlier missionary in Corinth, Paul, but you never met him.

You miss your husband, and you still find comfort in the afterlife teachings of Isis. The talk of resurrection that believers use reminds you of those teachings. It troubles you that some of the believers dismiss the idea of resurrection, but you don't know how to argue against their ideas.

(See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mysterios_of_Isis, and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_ancient_Rome)

Phoebe (female, age 60; see Rom 16:1-2)

You are a woman who is highly respected in your community. You live with your husband (your children have all left home and established their own families) in Cenchræe, a small harbor town just outside Corinth. You work with your husband in the shipping business that you inherited from your father. You travel for business, often with your husband but sometimes just with several slaves who are trusted managers.

Several years ago, you met Paul when you engaged him to make sails for your ships. He taught you about Jesus and you decided to follow Jesus. Your superficial participation in the required emperor-worship and the rituals of various other gods had never been satisfying—though you still participate when you have to for the sake of your business. But with Jesus, in the company of others who follow him, you find joy and meaning in life. As a woman, you find more honor and respect from fellow believers than you did in any temple. You participate freely in worship, praying, and prophesying, as well as singing. Your husband is not a believer, and sometimes he resents the time you spend with the assembly.

You are a deacon in the assembly of Jesus-followers that meets in Cenchræe. From your own resources you offered to support Paul, but he refused, and that insulted you. You continue to appreciate Paul, but after he left Corinth and Apollo came, you realized what a difference it makes to hear from a preacher of your own status, trained in the rhetoric of public speaking. When believers compare these two leaders, you find yourself torn between them.

One teaching by Paul that doesn't make sense to you is his talk of resurrection. You accept that Jesus was resurrected from the dead, but ordinary people aren't raised. Apollo and the traditional philosophers talk more sensibly about this.

(See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_ancient_Rome, and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imperial_cult_\(ancient_Rome\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imperial_cult_(ancient_Rome)))

Plotia (female, age 20)

You are a slave who works in the kitchen of a large household. Your master also demands sexual services from you. You dream of gaining your freedom, of finding a husband and having children, but that all seems impossible.

Through some other slaves you have learned about followers of Jesus, and about Paul who preaches that slaves are equal to free people in God's eyes. Whenever possible after a long day of work, you join a group that gathers to worship in the nearby house of Erastus. Usually you arrive late, after others have eaten the fellowship meal, so you miss supper at home and at the meeting. You don't get much respect from most of the believers.

But when the singing starts, you participate fully. Since in the assembly you have the rights of a free woman, you unbind your hair and dance your joy. You speak in tongues and pray aloud. Sometimes the Holy Spirit gives you a word of prophecy. For a slave, this freedom is rare, and you embrace it fully. From other slave women you have heard stories about the cult of Dionysius where women can experience spiritual possession and freedom. It's not for you, but you are excited to have your own ecstatic experiences.

Some believers are concerned about having the right ideas about God, but you are mostly interested in experiencing the fullness of life in the Holy Spirit. You don't care much about who is in charge or who is teaching, though you are fond of Paul, because he was the one who taught you that slaves can be free in Christ.

But you do wish that your master would leave you alone.

(See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavery_in_ancient_Rome, and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dionysian_Mysteries)

Quartus (male, age 20)

You were born a slave in a very poor family in Cenchræe. Like your father before you, you work in the harbor, mostly pulling small boats and cargo across the Diolkos.

On your small wage you cannot afford to buy your freedom, though you hate your difficult lot. You cannot even afford to marry and have children. From time to time you visit a prostitute. Sometimes, to make a bit of money, you have allowed some of the sailors to use you for sex.

One day a merchant spoke kindly to you and struck up a conversation about religion. You had heard about many religions and tried to manage the risks of life by not offending any gods or goddesses. But this man talked about Jesus, and you were intrigued, so you went to an assembly to learn more. Now you join the believers whenever possible, though you haven't been baptized. Sometimes the best thing about the meeting is the food, but often, because of your work, you arrive late and all the food is gone. Most of the people in the assembly don't pay attention to you, because you are a social nobody.

Many of the things that happen in the assembly are confusing to you. Sometimes people speak in languages that you can't understand; it's impressive, but it doesn't connect with you. And sometimes they talk about Jesus being resurrected from the dead. How is that possible? When people die, they go to Hades and that's the end.

(See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavery_in_ancient_Rome, and <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diolkos>)

Stephanas (male, age 55; see 1 Cor 1:16; 16:15, 17)

You were one of the first in Corinth to accept Paul's teaching and become a follower of Jesus. Paul himself baptized you and your whole household—wife, children, slaves—who all became Jesus' followers when you did.

Before that you were a nominal Jew but not much involved in the synagogue. The teachings of Judaism were not entirely persuasive to you. In order to get along in business, it is necessary to go along with a lot of emperor-worship and participation in ceremonies of other religions. When you heard Paul explain that Jesus makes it possible to worship and serve the one God without keeping kosher laws and other Jewish restrictions, you were drawn in and immediately requested baptism.

You have resources to provide services to the Christian community, and you would be happy to support Paul, but he refuses your patronage. Your business is exporting custom-designed objects made from the famous Corinthian bronze. You travel on business, and together with your slave, Fortunatus, and the bronze-maker, Achaicus, you served as a representative of the assembly in carrying the letter to Paul in Ephesus.

You continue to be fiercely loyal to Paul, while others are drawn to other preachers. You feel responsible to keep the assembly on the "right path." You also want to protect Paul from knowing about all the criticism of him that some people are saying.

You are not given to emotional expressions, and the ecstatic spirituality of some Christians puzzles you. Also, you don't understand why some believers think sex is bad. Your Jewish teaching has valued modesty and marital faithfulness, but within marriage sexual relations are considered to be good, and producing children is a religious duty.

(See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hellenistic_Judaism, and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corinthian_bronze)

Suria (female, age 25)

You are a slave captured in war as a teenager and kept by your master for sexual purposes and for other duties. For several years you have been working as a midwife in your own household and in the neighborhood, especially for prostitutes. Many of their female babies, like your own, are taken away and discarded at birth. Sons, when they are weaned, are taken away and sold to a master who will raise them as his own slaves.

Almost one year ago you delivered the baby of a slave in the house of Erastus. When you went back to check on the mother a few days later, the house was filled with people: slaves, free men, and a few masters. They listened to a man named Apollos speaking about Jesus, a Jew who they believe to be the Son of God. Though he was crucified, they claim he was resurrected and that he continues to speak to them through a spirit they called the Holy Spirit. This is quite strange to you. Until now you have only occasionally visited temples to appease the gods when your life seemed unbearable.

You were impressed by the tone of the conversation and the attitude of the people, so you went back as often as possible. Eventually you were convinced to join them through baptism.

The Holy Spirit has enabled you to speak in tongues, and sometimes you have been able through prayer to heal women who would otherwise have died in childbirth. These spiritual abilities have emboldened you to speak out in the assembly gatherings. Sometimes you have spoken a prophecy, but most often you speak in tongues and your spirit is blessed by it.

You don't expect ever to gain your freedom or even the respect of your master and the other slaves. But in the assembly of Jesus-followers, you are able for a brief time to set your shame aside and praise God.

(See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavery_in_ancient_Rome, and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_ancient_Rome)