

Tale of Two Cities

An Introduction to 1 Corinthians

Student Devotional

You're exploring New Orleans—a city where a historic church stands just steps away from a voodoo shop, where jazz music blends with street preaching, and where faith and temptation coexist at every turn. That's the kind of world the Apostle Paul stepped into when he arrived in **Corinth**, a busy port city loaded with cultural variety and moral chaos.

Just like modern cities—filled with diverse beliefs, moral “gray areas,” and intense pressure to conform—**Corinth was a melting pot**. Believers there had to figure out how to **stay true to Jesus** in a place that pulled them in all directions. They wrestled with divisions, immorality, and confusion about living as a Christian in a multicultural world.

Paul's letter to the Corinthian church feels like it was **written for us today**—calling us to keep Christ at the center, to seek holiness even when it's unpopular, to love in a world obsessed with itself, and to hold tight to the hope of the resurrection.

This five-day devotional will walk you through the story behind **1 Corinthians**, help you see how God planted a church in the middle of chaos, and equip you to **live faithfully** in your own “Corinth.”

Day 1: Welcome to Corinth—The City of Contrasts

Reading:

I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. (1 Corinthians 1:10)

After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. 2 And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, 3 and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers

by trade. 4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks. (Acts 18:1-4)

Think About It

Imagine stepping off a ship into Corinth's bustling marketplace. Vendors shout to attract attention, a hundred different languages echo through the streets, and travelers from Egypt, Rome, and beyond rush past. Temples to pagan gods tower above, flaunting their festivals and offering every pleasure imaginable. It's an environment **teeming with opportunity**—but also drowning in temptations.

Christians in Corinth were a small group trying to stay **true to Jesus** while everything around them pushed them toward compromise—**chase money, indulge your desires, or worship whichever god you want**. Sound familiar? Think about life today: a swirl of cultural influences, moral gray zones, and the relentless drive for success or status.

That's why Paul wrote 1 Corinthians—to show believers they could live for God **even in the hardest environment**. As we dive in, ask yourself: **Am I letting the culture shape me, or am I standing firm for Jesus in my everyday life?**

- What's one modern "Corinth" in your life—a place or situation that constantly tempts you to drift away from your faith?
- How can Paul's example of bringing the gospel to a chaotic city encourage you in that environment?

Pray It

Lord, sometimes my life feels just as chaotic as Corinth. Give me the courage to live for You when everything around me screams otherwise. Help me see that with You, I can stand firm, no matter the cultural pressures.

Do It

Identify **one specific environment**—your school, workplace, or friend group—where the pressure to "fit in" is strong. Ask God to help you **stand for Him** there this week, whether by speaking kindly instead of gossiping, or gently sharing your faith when the moment arises.

Day 2: God Plants a Church in the Midst of Chaos

Reading:

5 When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. **6** And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” **7** And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue. **8** Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. **9** And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, **10** for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.” **11** And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. (Acts 18:5-11)

Think About It

Paul didn't arrive in Corinth expecting a **spiritual vacation**. He'd been **rejected** in other cities, was a bit discouraged, and Corinth—full of pagan worship—didn't look promising. But here's the twist: **God had a plan**. He brought Paul together with new friends, Aquila and Priscilla, who became partners in ministry.

At first, the synagogue leader and many Jews opposed Paul, but then something amazing happened: the synagogue ruler **Crispus** believed in Jesus, a bunch of Gentiles believed, and a brand-new church was born. It was a reminder that even in a city known for its wild living, **God can spark revival**.

What's more, God encouraged Paul in a vision, saying, “Don't be afraid... I have many in this city who are My people.” It's like God was telling him, “*You might see chaos, but I see hearts ready for Me.*”

- Have you ever felt outnumbered as a Christian in your environment?
- How does it change your perspective to remember that **God might already be working in people's hearts**, even the ones who seem uninterested?

Pray It

Jesus, thank You for reminding me that I'm never alone. In every place that feels spiritually dry, You already have people ready to respond. Give me eyes to see where You're at work and the boldness to share my faith.

Do It

If there's a friend, neighbor, or classmate who seems **far from God**, pray specifically for them this week. Ask God to show you **one way** to reach out—maybe invite them to church or share a conversation about faith.

Day 3: The Real Struggles—Unity, Holiness, and Division

Reading:

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. 2 And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. (1 Corinthians 5:1-2)

Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." This "knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up. (1 Corinthians 8:1)

20 When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. 21 For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not. (1 Corinthians 11:20-22)

Think About It

Once the Corinthian church got rolling, they faced **internal drama**—not surprising given Corinth's tough environment. Some believers fell back into **sexual sins** that mirrored the city's immorality. Others **worshiped idols on the side**. And the church potlucks? They turned into a **status competition**, where the rich ate first and left the poor with scraps.

Paul's heart must have ached: these Christians had **God's Spirit**, but they were acting like **the rest of Corinth**. They forgot they were meant to be **a light in the darkness**—different, loving, and holy.

Sound familiar? Sometimes our churches look too much like the world—infighting, compromise, ignoring the poor. But Paul's correction leads us back to the basics: **keep Jesus central, remember you're called to be set apart, and treat each other with love.**

- Where have you seen **disunity** or **compromise** in your church or faith community?
- How might focusing on **Jesus and His truth** help us overcome those issues?

Pray It

God, forgive us for the times we act more like Corinth than Christ. Help our churches be places where love, holiness, and unity shine through, pointing others to You.

Do It

Is there **one issue** in your community or church that's causing division or moral confusion? Pray about it this week. Consider talking with a pastor or small group about **practical steps** to bring healing and clarity.

Day 4: Major Themes in 1 Corinthians—Unity, Holiness, Love, and Hope

Reading:

10 I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. (1 Corinthians 1:10)

19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, 20 for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and

all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. 4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. (1 Corinthians 13:1-8)

12 Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. 15 We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. 20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. (1 Corinthians 15:12-20)

Think About It

As you read 1 Corinthians, four big ideas stand out:

1. **Unity in Christ** – Paul begs believers to **stop the petty fights** and remember Jesus is the main thing.
2. **Holiness in Life** – Corinth had a casual attitude toward **sin**, but Paul insists our bodies and choices matter—they're for the Lord.
3. **The Power of Love** – Love isn't optional; it's the heartbeat of the Christian faith. Without it, even spiritual gifts mean nothing.
4. **Hope in the Resurrection** – Some doubted the afterlife, but Paul says if Christ isn't raised, we have no hope. Because He lives, everything changes.

These themes aren't just for Corinth. They're for us. Church's today struggle with **divisions**, moral gray areas, shallow love, and hopelessness too. Paul's message? **You can stand out from your culture** by living out these truths—**unity, holiness, love, and resurrection hope**.

- Which of these four themes hits closest to home for you? Why might God be nudging you in that area?
- What if you made these themes your “checklist” for spiritual growth—**Am I promoting unity? Am I pursuing holiness? Am I living in love? Am I clinging to resurrection hope?**

Pray It

Lord, these four themes challenge me. Help me not just read them, but live them. Make my life a testimony of unity, purity, love, and hope in You.

Do It

Choose **one** theme to focus on this week. Maybe it's **unity**—decide to reach out to someone you disagree with. Or **holiness**—commit to ditching a habit that pulls you away from God. Or **love**—serve someone selflessly. Or **hope**—remind yourself daily of Christ's resurrection power.

Day 5: Bringing Corinth's Lessons into Your Everyday Life

Reading:

13 Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. 14 Let all that you do be done in love. (1 Corinthians 16:13-14)

Think About It

Paul's experiences in Corinth show us that **faith can flourish** even in the most complicated settings. People were saved in a city known for sin. A church grew despite internal messiness. God used Paul's willingness to persevere—**and the Holy Spirit** did the rest.

As we wrap up this introduction to 1 Corinthians, think about your life: you might feel surrounded by a **modern Corinth**—cultural pressure, moral confusion, competing beliefs. Yet the same God who worked in Corinth works in you today.

You can live set apart—pursuing unity, striving for holiness, overflowing with love, and anchored in resurrection hope. That’s **the heart of 1 Corinthians**: no matter how chaotic the world feels, God’s truth stands firm, and He invites us to be a **light in our own “Corinth.”**

- In what ways can you be like **Paul**, stepping into challenging environments with faith and courage?
- Which of the four themes—**unity, holiness, love, or resurrection hope**—is your biggest challenge right now?

Pray It

Heavenly Father, thank You for showing me that no place is too dark for Your light to shine. Strengthen my faith in the midst of a culture that often pulls me away from You. Teach me to honor You with unity, holiness, love, and an unshakable hope.

Do It

This final day, **choose one practical step** to grow in the theme you find toughest. For instance:

- If it’s **unity**, seek out someone you’ve been in conflict with and try to reconcile.
- If it’s **holiness**, plan accountability with a trusted friend or mentor.
- If it’s **love**, write down a small act of kindness you can do every day for a week.
- If it’s **resurrection hope**, memorize a verse about eternal life and recite it whenever you feel discouraged.

Be ready to share your progress in class or with your small group, and encourage each other in the journey!

You’re Ready for Class!

You’ve seen how **Corinth** parallels **our modern world**—full of challenges but also ripe for the **powerful work of God**. As you step into your own “city,” whether that’s a literal city or just the environment you’re in, **remember these truths**:

1. **Unity** – Keep Christ at the center.

2. **Holiness** – Live differently by God’s standards.
3. **Love** – Let compassion be your defining trait.
4. **Resurrection Hope** – Remember Jesus conquered death, so there’s always a reason to stand firm.

Which theme is the toughest for you right now? **What step** will you take to grow? Come to class ready to share your goals—and **let’s spark the kind of transformation that even Corinth would envy!**

Before We Gather

- What are some similarities between the challenges of living in ancient Corinth and those we face today?
- How do modern cities reflect the cultural and moral environment of ancient Corinth?
- What do we learn from Paul’s experience about perseverance in ministry, even when facing rejection or fear?
- What do we learn from Paul’s experience about perseverance in the Christian life, even when facing rejection or fear?
- What can we learn from the early church about dealing with diversity and division in our congregations?
- How can we practice unity in our church this week?