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# WHAT'S IN YOUR TEACHING GUIDE

This Teaching Guide has three purposes:

- to give the teacher tools for focusing on the content of the session in the Study Guide.
- to give the teacher additional Bible background information.
- to give the teacher variety and choice in preparation.

The Teaching Guide includes two major components: Teacher Helps and Teacher Options.

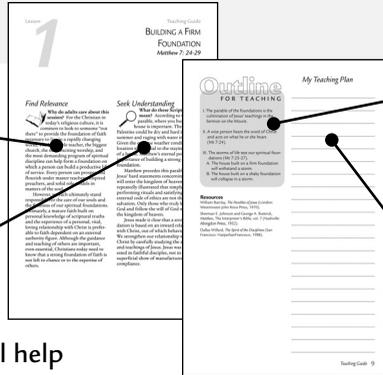
## Teacher Helps

### Find Relevance

helps you zero in on why each session is important for the adults you teach.

### Seek Understanding

presents helpful Bible Background informations and insights that will help you better understand the Scripture.

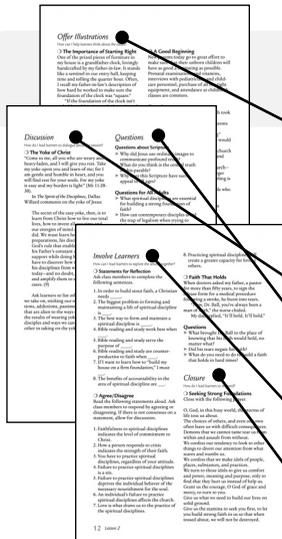


### Teaching Outline

provides you with an outline of the main themes in the Study Guide.

**My Teaching Plan** is a convenient place for you to make notes for teaching the session.

## Teacher Options



**Offer Illustrations** presents material that will help you paint a picture of the session. This section often presents items from church history, current events, or interesting anecdotes that help introduce the session.

**Discussion** provides teaching activities that will help learners discuss the Scripture text.

**Questions** presents multiple collections of questions for various kinds of adults.

**Involve Learners** helps learners become actively involved with the Scripture text for a particular session.

**Closure** gives you a means for wrapping up the session.

## You Can Choose!

There is more material in each session than you can use, so choose the options from each section to tailor the session to the needs of your group.

### Prepare Before the Session

Read the session for today in the Study Guide. Then read the options in this Teaching Guide, placing checkmarks beside the activities you plan to include. After you have decided which options to use, gather the appropriate materials.

## A CALL FOR UNITY IN MIND AND PURPOSE

*1 Corinthians 1:10, 18-31*

### Find Relevance



**Why do adults care about this session?** It is important that we learn how to be individuals *within* the community, especially if we hope to give our best to the church. It is also an important lesson for the church if it hopes to give its best to the world. All of us live with accumulated baggage, issues, agendas, labels, and emotions that can get in the way of allowing community to happen. Without our being aware of it, our “baggage” can push us outward and away from our need to be centered in Christ. Remaining centered in divine grace requires much humility. If church is to happen, then we must extend grace to others in the same way that we need others to extend grace to us in return.

Too often, the church engages in petty debates over “right” doctrine or about programs and forgets the call of the church to love as God loves. This session is important because it places resounding emphasis on the truth of love fully revealed in the cross of Jesus Christ. The divine truth to which the church has been called is costly grace, and it is the basis of unity in mind and purpose. No matter how righteous, intelligent, powerful, or proud we might become, nothing else matters save the cross and divine love. Such love is the beginning, journey, and end of all that God is and all that the Christian church should be about.

### Seek Understanding



**What do these Scriptures mean?** Paul calls the Corinthians to a unity of mind and purpose in light of the cross. He acknowledges *schismata*, or divisions that are evident. The word *schismata* refers to tears in a garment (Mt 9:16) and suggests that the Corinthian congregation is in danger of being torn apart. What are the divisions that have caused such alarm? Church members have identified personal affiliation with certain leaders, apparently without the leaders’ awareness. Some claim to be of Paul and are often identified as a Gentile party who, having received Christ’s freedom, now believe they have complete license to sin. Apollos, an intellectual Jew from Alexandria, has amassed a following due to his eloquent speaking skills. Perhaps those who claim him as leader have sought to turn Christianity into a philosophy. Cephas is the Aramaic name of Peter, who also has gathered a following, possibly Jews who are insistent upon exalting the law. Finally, there are those who claim to be of Christ, a group who may view the Son as a mystery instead of a physical, living being who suffered and died on the cross. Whatever the source of the divisions, Paul accentuates the essence of the gospel, which is Jesus Christ crucified.



## Offer Illustrations

How can I help learners think about the issues?

### ○ Always Do Right

Mark Twain once said, “Always do right. This will gratify some people and astonish the rest.” Doing the right thing from a Christian perspective means living in the likeness of Christ. The world is in need of a relevant message of love that requires the church to be stewards of servant-living.

### Questions

- Why is the cross a symbol of love?
- In what ways do we accomplish living in Christ’s likeness? In what ways do we fail?

### ○ Sacrificial Living

In Philippians Paul writes:

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. (2:1-5)

### Questions

- What is sacrificial living?
- Why is sacrificial living so important in Paul’s call to be of one mind?

### ○ The Gospel of Consumerism

We live in an age that preaches a gospel of consumerism. We are taught that we can never be good enough; that we can never have enough; and that the secret to happiness is buying, buying, and more buying. Our spirits are tuned in to the idea of getting. “Instead of the chalice, we sip super-sized soft drinks. Instead of sacramental bread, we gobble fast-food burgers” (Murray, 14 July 2001). But the gospel that Paul preaches is one that teaches the ministry of meaning, the healing of humility, and the satisfaction of service. Christ gave and he calls us to give as well.

### Questions

- How is the wisdom of the cross relevant in our materialistic culture?
- How do we excuse our materialism?
- How does the cross of Christ offer us perspective?
- How does your church practice the meaningful ministry?
- How have you experienced the satisfaction of service?
- What is Christ calling you to give?

## Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

### ○ Living in Costly Love

There is much emphasis in the church on “correct” theology. But we live in a time when the church is being forced to rethink its mission and purpose in the modern world. Although it is an exciting journey, the contemporary church struggles with moral issues like homosexuality, abortion, and stem cell research, and with church issues like women in ministry, worship styles, and charismatic influences. It is in times like these that we need to remember that Paul’s emphasis is on the unity of mind that focuses on the cross of Christ. Ask your learners to discuss how the church can unify around the costly love of the cross when there are so many individual differences in theology and ethics.

### Questions

- How can the church at large be of one mind when we believe so differently?
- How does the local church accomplish unity?
- What are some examples of how the costly love of the cross has unified the church?
- In what ways do we allow our differences to overshadow the love of the cross?

## Questions

### Questions about Scripture

- What problems within the Corinthian church prompted Paul to write?
- Why is it important for the church to be unified in the same mind and purpose?
- What are the “foolishness of the cross” and the “wisdom of God”?

### Questions for All Adults

- What about the wisdom of God should lead to Christian action?
- How would you explain the nature of God’s wisdom?
- Do denominations contribute to or inhibit the unity of the Spirit in the church at large?

### Questions for Mature Adults

- What does it mean to be baptized in the cross rather than being baptized to the allegiance of any particular human leader?
- How would you describe the “foolishness of the cross”?
- What does Paul mean in 1 Corinthians 1:18 when he writes, “The message of the cross...to us being saved is the power of God”?

### Questions for Younger Adults

- What is the immediate gratification of following God’s “foolishness”?
- How can the life of the cross make me a richer person?
- How does the wisdom of God meet my need to feel accepted by others as well as secure and confident in myself?

### Questions for Adults with Children

- How do you teach children the importance of caring for others?
- How do you raise children to be confident and yet humble in their abilities?
- Why is it important for children to be part of a church that is unified in mind and purpose?

## Involve Learners

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

### ○ Working Backward

Photocopy the mazes included in the Resource Kit for this session and distribute one to each learner. Ask your participants to work the maze at the top of the page first, beginning at the obvious place. Give them only a very brief time to complete this maze. Then, ask learners to work the maze at the bottom of the page, but this time ask them to start at the end of the maze and work backward toward the beginning.



The point of this exercise is to dialogue about setting goals and then working backward toward our objectives. Talk with your group about how the gospel message encourages humility, simplicity, and service. Then ask participants to list some biblical goals consistent with the wisdom of God. Ask someone to record these goals on the board before you invite the group to work together to list tangible objectives that will help participants realize their goals.

### ○ Role Priority

Give each person paper and a pencil, asking them to list the many different roles they fulfill. Ask them to consider how they spend their time and how their activities, commitments, habits, actions, beliefs, and interests reflect their values.

### Questions

- Which roles are central to your lives?
- Which roles do you want to be central?
- How would another person observing your time commitments characterize your faith priorities?

### ○ The Redemptive Minority

In his understanding of the “redemptive minority,” Dr. L. D. Johnson writes, “If you read the Bible much, you will conclude that the Almighty has known all along that if this world is changed it will be because of a dedicated minority. Somebody must be willing to be different, to care more, to give more, sacrifice more, work harder, and, if necessary, die” (43). Post this statement on the board and ask your learners the following questions.

### Questions

- Do you agree with Dr. Johnson?
- What do you think he means?
- Who is the redemptive minority?

## Closure

How do I lead learners to respond?

### ○ Daily Discipline

Encourage each of your group members to begin keeping a daily journal. Such a practice encourages us to reflect continually upon the priorities in our lives. Ask your learners to reflect upon how they can be in community with each other and how their love for each other can strengthen the larger church of which they are a part. Then engage in silent meditation before closing in prayer.

# 2

## A CALL TO MATURITY

1 Corinthians 2:1-16

### Find Relevance



**Why do adults care about this session?** Our world seems smaller because our scope of knowledge has increased with expanding technological advances. We no longer dream of conquering the frontier, but now believe that one day we will inhabit Mars and beyond. Conversely, what we once believed to be secure is now hampered by conflicting values. In such a world, the church must boldly proclaim and humbly live out the reality of the cross.

Jesus Christ crucified is the word of hope for a confused world. He is the good news that God loves us, that the gracious Son died for us, and that his death has been encompassed in the glory of the resurrection. Thus, God's love embraces our deepest hurts and opens us to the very heart of God. If people of faith can understand the divine heart in some new way because of our knowledge of "Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (2:2), the church will move beyond petty judgments and begin to exemplify the depth of God's divinity and presence with us. And the world in need will listen.

### Seek Understanding



**What do these Scriptures mean?** The cross is the center of the gospel message, but not its entirety (compare 2:2 with 15:3). Yet, while the cross is inseparable from the resurrection, the resurrection does not erase the event of the cross. Paul's intent is to emphasize the cross as God's love. When he claims "to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (2:2), the word "crucified" is used to describe a completed action that has produced an effect which will echo for all future time. Through the resurrection, all eternity is embraced by God's saving event on the cross, for believers realize the nature of God's compassion.

Who are the *teleioi*, or the mature (2:6)? The word references those who have reached perfection. Paul's Greek audience was flooded with secret tips for escaping sinful flesh. But Paul's Jewish influence allowed him to believe that the divine alone reveals the mystery of God. God's love cannot be discovered or earned, only received. Paul invites the mature to grow. An ancient Chinese proverb says, "The closed fist can receive nothing." Similarly, Paul challenges those at Corinth to open their minds and hearts and grow in the wisdom of God, the "foolishness of the cross."



## Offer Illustrations

How can I help learners think about the issues?

### ○ The Earth Seems So Serene

The earth seems so serene when you are flying high above it. Everything appears to fit together. It's not until you come closer to the earth that you really begin to see the businesses, the homes, and the many cars going to and from who knows where. I often wonder who the people are and what their stories might be. Along similar lines, we tend to be so busy that we often fly right by the places where God is at work. We even soar past the places and situations where the gospel needs to be told through our own lives and the life of our community.

### Questions

- When have you missed an opportunity to see God at work? Explain.
- When do you think you have missed an opportunity to share the gospel?
- What makes our lives worth living?

### ○ What Can We Give?

Paul's call to the cross is an invitation to do something that will make a difference in the kingdom. The church, then, is not about what we can get, but about what we can give. John Claypool writes about some significant insights he learned from the personnel manager of a large corporation.

This man drew a distinction between two basic kinds of persons: those who want most "to be something" and those whose primary desire is "to do something." In this man's view, people intent on "being something" were those who did not have their ego-needs met healthily. Thus, they tended to use the job to enhance themselves. They asked in every situation, "How can I turn this event to my advantage

and make it a stepping stone in my career?" "Obviously," the personnel manager said, "these kinds of persons can never risk anything or make a hard decision. Their vision is severely limited by self-concern."

On the other hand, those people who were intent on "doing something" did have their ego-needs met healthily. They were the ones who were able to ask at a given moment, "What needs to be done here, irrespective of the impact on me?" This frame of reference is different from that of the one who has to "be something" in that something larger than self is seen as the end, and that self is seen as the means to that end. "People who think this way," the personnel manager concluded, "are infinitely more valuable and productive to the company, than those who are concerned primarily with themselves." (91-92)

### Question

- Why does the church need people who are preoccupied with "doing something"?

## Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

### ○ Does It Add Up?

The knowledge of Jesus Christ crucified is in direct contrast to Paul's admonition against boasting (compare 2:2 with 1:31). Martin Luther King, Jr. once observed, "This numerical growth [in churches] should not be overemphasized. We must not be tempted to confuse spiritual power and large numbers.... An increase in quantity does not necessarily represent a correspondingly increased commitment to Christ" (59).

Ask your group to list instances when nationalism, denominationalism, or church growth have conveyed a spirit of boasting. Then ask your learners to consider how some of our programming might be at the expense of the cross.

### ○ The Heart Has Reason

Pascal observed that "the heart has reason that reason cannot know." Paul's insistence was that knowledge of God cannot be ascertained through human logic. In fact, the ways of God are in contrast to the ways of humanity. The Apostle is quite emphatic that the educated and the powerful should be leery of their own intellect and position, because reliance on self is never the road to God. Those who are the weakest among us are the ones God uses to manifest the divine presence in the world.

### Question

- What is the relationship between faith and the mind?

## Questions

### Questions about Scripture

- Why does Paul emphasize that he comes "in weakness and in fear and in much trembling" (2:3)?
- What is the wisdom of God?
- What is the mind of Christ?

### Questions for All Adults

- Can our human insecurities contribute toward a healthy humility? Explain.
- Do you think the foolishness of the cross is in your church? Why or why not?
- What does God call our church to do?

### Questions for Mature Adults

- How does the suffering of Christ enlighten our understanding of God?
- What is the relevance of the crucified Christ for us?
- What unique responsibilities do the mature have in formulating and addressing the mission of the church?

### Questions for Younger Adults

- How does the wisdom of God enrich our self-esteem and our ability to relate to others?
- How does the wisdom of God inform our purpose and calling?

### Questions for Adults with Children

- How can the foolishness of the cross help teach our children about the futility of jealousy and judgment?
- How can I help my children grow in their faith and their desire to do something for Jesus Christ?
- What can the wisdom of God teach me and my child about trust?

## *Involve Learners*

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

### ○ Seeking to Mature

In this session, we discover that Paul places a great deal of emphasis on the need to be mature in Christ. Each of us brings weaknesses and strengths to the table that affect the way we live in community. Distribute index cards to each member of your group, asking them to list on one side of the card three personal weaknesses that affect the life of the church, and on the other side three personal strengths. Then ask them to reflect upon their own behaviors and to consider how they might change them in order to have a positive effect in the life of the gathered community.

Continue by reminding your group that the foolishness of the cross is about the willingness to give in the name of Christ. It is also about a preoccupation with the care of others instead of a care for self. This is the way of God. Distribute another index card to each learner, this time asking them to list the qualities of the three people they admire the most. After a few moments, ask your participants to design a plan for developing these qualities in their lives as they seek to mature in the mind of Christ.

### ○ The Centrality of the Cross

Paul's perspective on the centrality of the cross requires that the believer rethink his or her understanding of God. Ask your learners to list and then discuss how the cross can broaden their understanding of Jesus Christ. Then ask learners to describe their personal concepts of God. Use the following questions to aid the dialogue. Once learners have listed their attributes of God, help them to rethink those attributes in light of Jesus Christ and the cross.

## Questions

- What does God look like?
- Where does God dwell?
- How do you imagine the voice of God?
- Do you imagine that God is near or far?

## *Closure*

How do I lead learners to respond?

### ○ The Mixing Bowl

Read the following poem to your group. If possible, set up a table with an ordinary brown mixing bowl as a visual aid.

Suggest to your group that we are like mixing bowls—made of clay, open and simple. Then read the following poetry excerpt.

when life can fill us  
to the rim, brimming.  
We are the mixing place  
where terror and hate,  
where love and hope,  
the way we move,

our smiles and uncertainties,  
our courage and stupidities  
are all embraced.  
We are the body bowl...  
the forming space,  
the home of possibility.  
(Norris, 21)

Close with a prayer, asking God that new possibilities of grace and the kingdom be born within us. Remind your group that our willingness, courage, gifts, and humility are the hands of God in a world that needs to receive God's love.

## WHAT CAUSES DIVISION?

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

### Find Relevance



**Why do adults care about this session?** This text cannot be read apart from the previous chapter, for its context must be understood in Paul's exhortation for spiritual believers to be mature (2:1-16). The Apostle's point is that the church will be measured according to their unity of mind, peace, and genuine love. Where divisions exist, Paul discerns a lack of maturity, humility, and trust necessary for a mature spiritual community to thrive.

Humility and trust are qualities that should not be overlooked. Righteousness and spiritual snobbery know no bounds. They are rampant in the church and destroy the fellowship from within because they are in contrast to the message of the cross. The gathered community too often looks for the big sins that "everybody else" has, but unfortunately that only creates a false sense of security. If those in the church can define their own goodness in terms of comparison to all they deem bad, then God must surely be pleased and grateful for the church's presence. But the church is not a place where saints gather. Rather, it is a place where sinners come in need of grace. When we come in weakness with gratitude for grace, there is no time for division because we remain united at the point of the cross.

### Seeking Understanding



**What do these Scriptures mean?** The people of Corinth are not mature spiritually, but they are *sarkinoi*, or people of the flesh (3:1). In and of itself, such a label is not a condemnation. All of us are human and, therefore, made of the flesh. But Paul takes the matter further by referring to the Corinthians as *sarkikoi* (3:3)—or people who are dominated by the flesh—which means they are separated from God, they belong to this world rather than to God's kingdom, and they are not under the control of God's spirit so necessary for unity of mind to occur.

Maturity is a process by which our human will gradually gives way to God's will for us. At Corinth, the community is content to remain separated from God, separated from each other, and consequently, physically alive but spiritually dead. Paul recognizes that even though we may be physically alive, we do not really live apart from the life of Christ and his Spirit within us. As he observed to the Romans, "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you" (Rom 8:11).



## Offer Illustration

How can I help learners think about the issues?

### ○ They Know Not What They Do

Regarding humanity's intellectual and spiritual blindness, Martin Luther King, Jr. reflected upon Jesus' statement, "They know not what they do." King observed that "blindness was their trouble; enlightenment was their need. We must recognize that Jesus was nailed to the cross not simply by sin but also by blindness" (40).

### Questions

- How is "blindness" our trouble?
- What mission does the church fail to see?

### ○ We Need Other People

Rabbi Harold Kushner observed that, Other people may complicate our lives, but life without them would be unbearably desolate.... None of us can be truly human in isolation. The qualities that make us human emerge only in the ways we relate to other people. Hell is having worked so hard for success that it corroded your relationships with other people so that you learned to see them only in terms of what they could do for you. (53-54)

### Questions

- What does our church do to help us get to know each other?
- How would our church be different if relationships were not important?
- What are some examples of seeing others "in terms of what they could do for you"?

### ○ Failing to Really See

When my son was 10, he loved to discuss astronomy. Through his perseverance, I became aware of constellations like Aquarius, Sagittarius, and Virgo. He opened an entirely new vista for me by pointing out planets in the heavens and even teaching me the beauty of space when seen through a telescope. I remember one night when he had the moon in focus and invited me to look. On this particular evening, there was a full moon. Through the lens of the telescope, I saw this celestial ball in ways I had never imagined it before. It's not as if I had not had other opportunities. The moon was always there, yet I had failed to really see it. Likewise, we do not really see many of the people with whom we worship. But they have stories to tell and perspectives to share. They have gifts to offer and wisdom to discern. They are present, but not truly part of our community.

### Questions

- How do we really observe the presence and perspectives of both new and current members of our church?
- How inviting are we? How do we relate to others?
- What draws us to want to be with some people and to neglect others?

## Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

### ○ High-Performing Teams

In their classic text on management, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*, Bolman and Deal list the six distinguishing characteristics of “high-performing teams.” These characteristics are:

- 1) High-performing teams shape purpose in response to a demand or an opportunity placed in their path.
- 2) High-performing teams translate common purpose into specific, measurable performance goals.
- 3) High-performing teams are of manageable size.
- 4) High-performing teams develop the right mix of expertise.
- 5) High-performing teams develop a common commitment to working relationships.
- 6) Members of high-performing teams hold themselves collectively accountable. (92-94)

Ask your learners to discuss the relevance of Bolman’s and Deal’s observations for the church.

### Questions

- What is the common purpose of the church?
- What are manageable goals?
- What is an appropriate size for a community of faith?
- How do you coordinate gifts and expertise with needs?
- Why is it important that relationships in the church be nurtured?
- How can church members hold each other accountable in ways measured by grace instead of judgment?

## Questions

### Questions about Scripture

- What is the relationship between the mystery of God and the foolishness of the cross?
- To what does God give growth?
- What does it mean to be a people of the flesh?

### Questions for All Adults

- How can one be spiritually mature yet still remain spiritually humble?
- What causes jealousy and quarreling in the church?
- Does the contemporary church identify with particular human leaders?

### Questions for Mature Adults

- What is the secret wisdom of the mature?
- What responsibility, if any, do the spiritually mature bear in maintaining unity in the church?
- What is the difference between spiritual maturity and spiritual righteousness?

### Questions for Younger Adults

- What is the relationship between building a career and becoming spiritually mature?
- What priorities need to be established in order to maintain a focus on becoming spiritually mature?
- How do we maintain a commitment to servanthood while seeking to become spiritually mature?

### Questions for Adults with Children

- How can the church model spiritual maturity for children?
- How does the common purpose of the cross mandate that the church maintain a ministry to children?
- How are divisions within the church disruptive to the spiritual lives of children?

## *Involve Learners*

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

### ○ **Priorities of Time**

Have your learners recall how they spent their time last week. Ask them to reflect on time spent working, doing household chores, enjoying leisure activities, nurturing relationships, and participating in other commitments such as civic clubs or volunteer work. Now ask your group if the time spent on these daily activities reflects their priorities.

We have a tendency to become frustrated and discouraged when the time we “spend” on certain activities is out of balance with what is truly important to us. For example, parents may feel over-committed in work or volunteer activities, feeling hurried and frazzled and finding little time to devote attention to their children. Likewise, a person may feel that their professional commitments leave little by way of creative energy for their spouse or their children. Finally, ask your learners to think of ways they can adjust their time commitments to better reflect their priorities.

### ○ **Priorities of Resource**

Ask your learners to reflect on how the church spends its resources (not just money). Consider whether the church’s resources are being used on the things that fulfill the church’s mission. Consider also how the church is spending its emotional energy. What might aid the church’s ability to minister to the community?

## *Closure*

How do I lead learners to respond?

### ○ **Yeast**

Encourage your learners to continue to grow in their spiritual pilgrimage by reading their Bibles regularly and keeping a daily journal. Ask them to pay particular attention to their emotions and to stay in tune with their feelings and the source of those feelings. Encourage learners not to label others or themselves and, especially, to refrain from judging the motives of others. Ask your group to reflect on ways that barriers between themselves and others can be removed and to pray for strength to be used in building bridges of healing and hope.

Close with a prayer, asking God to help us be free to love and to serve. Lead your group in a prayer of confession for all the ways that the faithful have been too zealous in their righteousness and too proud in their prayers. Ask for the Spirit of God to work a new creation in each group member. Pray that we will set priorities for living that honor the way of God.

## BUILDING ON A SOLID FOUNDATION

1 Corinthians 3:10-23

### Find Relevance



**Why do adults care about this session?** The heritage of the church is the context for Paul's instruction to the Corinthians.

Paul insists that the church is a place where people gather to love, and as an extension of Christ's grace, it is also a place they leave from in order to serve others. Church happens when servants share their gifts for the common purpose of *being* good news.

The local congregation is also the place, according to Paul, where God has chosen to establish God's temple—the foundation by which the world can come to know and experience God. Accordingly, the church is not the possession of any one individual or group. The church belongs to God. As such, we are its stewards, called to meet in a holy place, to be united in the work of the cross, and resolved to share the gospel of love. Those who manipulate or control the church, those who destroy its fellowship, and those who give less than their absolute best in terms of finances, integrity, and intellect will be judged. God is in control and the church is invited to participate in a journey that links all creation to a divine work that will consummate in God's kingdom.

### Seek Understanding



**What do these Scriptures mean?** The emphasis of this lesson's text is on shoddy work-

manship. Church members are called to use their best gifts so that the church is strengthened for its ministry in the world. The servants are challenged to leave a profound legacy for future generations. Servants' contributions will be judged, resulting in reward or loss, but they will be saved (3:14-15).

This text is potentially difficult to understand. Some have used it to support the doctrine of purgatory. Others have used it to emphasize the security of the believer. But, as Polhill observes, the point of emphasis is not on the believer but on the church itself (335).

Regarding judgment, we should keep in mind Paul's theological context of future judgment (Dan 7:9-10; Mal 4:1-2a). Without diminishing the biblical truth of an end-time climax, we can also emphasize God's judgment of human faithfulness in each moment we live.



## Offer Illustration

How can I help learners think about the issues?

### ○ Claiming the Heritage of the Church

My mother is a product of the Great Depression. She grew up in a little town in southwest Mississippi that was solely dependent on the local lumber mill. The mill owned the town, owned the homes that the people lived in, and collected the monthly rent that allowed the workers and their families a place to stay.

Long after the mill had closed and my aunt, who was really more like a grandmother to me, had bought the place where my mother had lived as a child, we made annual pilgrimages to visit my mother's family. For two weeks out of every year we went to Quentin, Mississippi. There I would play in the creek, walk in the woods, listen to the roosters crow, watch the cows graze, eat hand-dipped ice cream, and live at a much slower pace than even my parents had grown accustomed to. Looking back, I recognize that my parents were giving me a sense of heritage. They were giving me a sense of the sounds and sights that had been familiar to my mother.

Perhaps it's not too much of a stretch to say that church ought to be a place where we gain a sense of heritage—a place where we sense the sounds and sights of our faith. The church can be a home, a place where we work constantly to create a sense of belonging, a place where we can gather to worship the living Lord.

### Question

- How can we learn from the heritage of the church in order to strengthen its relevance for our own time as well as the future?

### ○ Church Commitment

God calls us to give our best. However, the excerpt below from *Imagining a Church in the Spirit*, by Johnson and McDonald, emphasizes how little many in the church give and how little the church itself expects of its members.

Years ago I spoke farewells to those who had attended the last session of a particular Inquirers Class, the very meeting in which I sought to close the deal of bringing new members on board. I noticed that two young couples stayed behind, talking intently with each other. Neither of these couples had ever belonged to a congregation. They looked worried.

"Can I answer questions for you?" I asked.

"Well," they stammered, "we're not quite sure we're ready to make such a huge commitment."

"What's troubling you exactly?" I replied.

"There's attendance for one thing," said one of the husbands. "I'm not sure we can be here every Sunday of the year."

"Oh, don't worry about that!" I assured them. I watched the tension flee from their faces as I described what amounted to the least common denominator of church involvement....

They smiled. They joined the church. They participated irregularly.

I wish I could have a second shot at that conversation.... It occurred to me about that time that the Rotary Club was asking me to make a greater commitment—and promising swift retribution if I fell short—than I had ever dreamed of demanding of a church member. (55)

### Questions

- Do you think churches should require a certain level of commitment from members? Why or why not?
- What are people's hesitations about committing to a church?

## Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

### ○ Continuing Commitment

Read the Johnson and McDonald illustration from “Offer Illustrations” and ask your group if they think these authors are correct in their assertion that the local civic club demands more of its members than is required of church members.

What is necessary for the church to be a place where people *want* to come and serve instead of feeling obligated to do so? How can church members care for each other and share responsibility so that the few do not risk burnout?

Can the church be characterized as a living community of faith composed of living stones? If so, what stones do we need to contribute and what stones do we need to lay aside in order to build successfully?

Why is it important for the church to dream of a new society where all are one in Christ Jesus?

How can worship best call forth crucial life-questions? Such questions drive at the heart of who we are both as individuals and as the gathered community of God. What is our purpose? What is it that God wants us to do? And how can our church contribute to the fulfillment of humankind’s greatest spiritual need, which is the transformation of people into children of God called to serve the world?

## Questions

### Questions about Scripture

- What does it mean to build on the foundation of Jesus Christ?
- How do you interpret Paul’s use of gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, and straw as elements that are used to build the church?
- What does it mean to be God’s temple?

### Questions for All Adults

- What is authentic church-building?
- What does it mean to say that God is in charge of the church?
- How can we keep the mission of the church in proper perspective?

### Questions for Mature Adults

- What do you think of Paul’s word on judgment to those who would destroy the church’s unity or weaken its integrity?
- What does it mean to be a holy community?
- What standards of excellence should we follow in “building” the church?

### Questions for Younger Adults

- What priorities should I consider in joining the church?
- Is it more important to discern what I can offer the church or what church membership can offer me? Explain.
- What responsibility should I take in working toward the success of the church?

### Questions for Adults with Children

- What do your children understand about your commitment to the church?
- How do children understand their own commitment to the church?
- How can I model for my children trust in God?

## Involve Learners

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

### ○ Discerning Gifts

Since most people enjoy doing things they are good at, church members are less likely to experience burnout and more likely to participate, even lead, if the task is one they believe they can manage.

Distribute index cards and ask your learners to list three things they enjoy doing—that is, activities or projects that provide them satisfaction. Next, ask them to list three things for which they are often commended, things that others believe they do well. Finally, ask your participants to reflect on their dreams for the church and to list three ways they would like to contribute to the mission of the church. Challenge group members to seek ways to make their dreams reality.

### ○ Counting Exercise

Make copies of the Resource Kit page for this session and give a copy to each of your adults. Ask them to count the number of triangles in the figure. The idea behind the exercise is for individuals to discover that as they begin to count, the figure will reveal many more triangles contained within. After allowing for adequate time to complete the exercise, discuss how oftentimes as we begin to look closely at a situation, activity, or program, more and more possibilities for creative involvement reveal themselves.



## Closure

How do I lead learners to respond?

### ○ Reflective Reading

Perhaps only authentic sages can truly speak about love and how it transforms us. We are not sages. We are ordinary people. Even still, our ordinariness is a good enough credential to entitle us to speak boldly from the heart, for together we are becoming something which is not yet apparent. Dough does not know what is being made of it. Yet bread possesses an absolute integrity. Perhaps we can accept that “unknowing” is a blessing, for then we can be transformed. We can become something “for God” (Norris, 6).

Close with a prayer, asking God to help us to love and be free to serve. Ask for God’s guidance in setting priorities that honor the ways of God’s kingdom.



# WORKING BACKWARD

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FINISH

FINISH

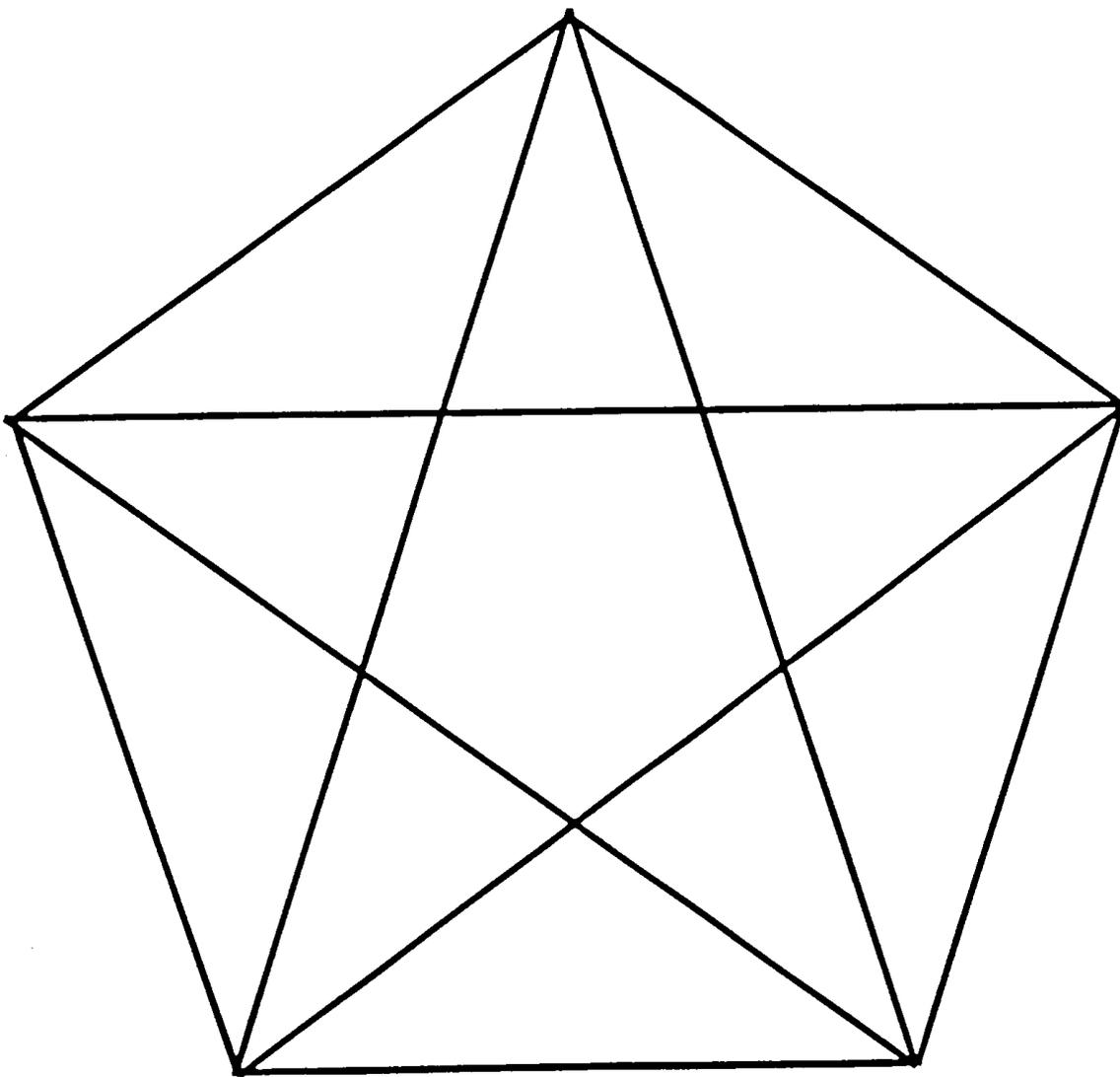
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# COUNTING EXERCISE

**Instructions:** Count the number of triangles in the figure.



TOTAL \_\_\_\_\_

