



GRACE

in the

MESS

Grace in the Mess

A Daily Devotional of 1 Corinthians

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Troy Schmidt

Grace in the Mess – A Daily Devotional of 1 Corinthians

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Introduction

We got a dog. Well, for now. The dog is five-years-old and it's taking some time adjusting to him and I'm sure he's adjusting to us. He came with some bad habits and we're a little rusty at this whole dog responsibility thing.

Last night we found a hand towel in the living room. My wife and I stared at it, wondering how it got there. It was a Christmas gift from our son's girlfriend, and now it had a hole chewed into it. Guess who the culprit was? (Hint: it wasn't me.)

Grace wasn't the first reaction that went through my mind. I mean, how dare this dumb animal come into my home and rip up my stuff. When I call to the dog to come outside or get off the bed, the dog just stares at me with that look that says, "who do you think you are?"

If I stopped to think a moment, I wonder if that's how God sees us. He invites us into his world and we make a mess. He provides us with food and shelter and we make a mess. Then we look back at him with that "so-what-are-you-going-to-do-about-it" face. But instead of getting mad at us, he shows us grace.

Grace is undeserved favor. We do nothing to earn God's love and compassion. He simply chooses to show it to us, even when we've been a "bad dog."

Paul established the church in Corinth then received news that there problems of division, sexual immorality and fighting between believers. Those of us who have been in church a long time get it.

Church is messy.

But grace needs to be shown in those in the church and those outside the church. We should show grace to those in our small group, during our services, in the parking lot and online.

Why? Because God shows us grace all the time. Enjoy this 30-Day devotional to discover God's grace in your messy world.

Troy Schmidt / Windermere, FL / April 2025

Day 1

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

I always thank my God for you because of the grace of God given to you in Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in him in every way, in all speech and all knowledge. In this way, the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you, so that you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you will be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; you were called by him into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.
1 Corinthians 1:4-9

Paul began his letter as he did most letters, stating his resume and credentials. As an apostle, he had authority. He was called by Jesus himself on that road to Damascus. The hearer of this letter would sit up in his seat and listen carefully.

In all of his letters, Paul always tells the church how he feels about them. In Ephesians chapter 1, Paul said he heard about their faith. In Colossians chapter 1, he thanked God for them and their hard work. In Galatians chapter 1, Paul was shocked how quickly they abandoned the message he planted in their city.

As for the church in Corinth, Paul was thankful. Why?

- They had been enriched in their teaching, communication, testimony and knowledge, meaning they were being profitable in the way they communicated Christ. (verse 5)
- They were using their spiritual gifts and every spiritual gift they needed was being employed at the time. (verse 7)
- They were eagerly waiting for Jesus to return and actively engaged in their community while doing so. (verse 8)

Imagine how relieved the church felt hearing those words.

Grace in the Mess – 1 Corinthians

Paul wrapped up this opening encouragement by saying something all of us in the church need to hear.

- Jesus is coming back
- God will hold you and protect you until Jesus returns
- God is faithful
- He's called us into fellowship with Jesus Christ

Church, let's summarize those four points in one sentence: Jesus is coming back and while you wait, God faithfully has your back, as he calls you into a close relationship with his Son.

The word Paul used for fellowship is *koinōnia*. It's a word that means community, an intimate partnership. There's a closeness and brotherhood associated with that word. As people enjoyed that intimacy with Jesus, they enjoy the closeness with one another. There's nothing like a church that enjoys *koinōnia*. However that fellowship can be easily broken with the slightest rumor or accusation. Once Satan gets his foot in the door, it can all come crashing down.

We must show grace when it all gets messy.

The best example of grace is found in Paul's co-writer, Sosthenes at the letter's opening. Here's when we first met him.

And they all seized Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal, but none of these things mattered to Gallio. Acts 18:19

Sosthenes was beaten by his fellow Corinthians and yet he partnered with Paul to write this letter of love to the church.

That's messy grace.

Prayer Focus:

- Thank God for your church
- For grace shown to those in the church
- For enrichment in the way you mature in your faith

Day 2

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.
1 Corinthians 1:10

Our church is unique in that it offers a variety of campuses with pastors of a variety of ages, who communicate in a variety of styles. Some are eloquently versed in the Greek and Hebrew language. Others tell stories of their kids screaming in the stores at check-out. Some use props. Others love graphs. Some speak plainly and conversationally while others love the dramatic.

But that's okay. We all learn differently. We all have different styles of music we enjoy. We all decorate, entertain and watch different types of shows. Different isn't bad.

The problem is when *preference* becomes a command. That's when we say a pastor, speaker or preacher is the only pastor, speaker or preacher one should listen to and all the others are wrong.

Paul heard about this difference in the church at Corinth. Some were claiming allegiance to different communicators and drawing lines, leading to quarrels.

Let's remember, they didn't have the New Testament scripture laid out before them like we do so they relied on communicators to tell them the truth about Jesus. As a result, they claimed allegiance to Paul, Apollos, Cephas (aka Peter) and Christ. It was like a Football Fantasy Draft.

The correct answer to the questions brought up by the division was Christ. He's who we all should follow. Now, some

Grace in the Mess – 1 Corinthians

communicators may help us better follow Christ through their style, delivery and knowledge (that's okay), but Jesus is the right answer (to really everything!).

Paul further emphasized to the church there should be no division in Christ. No pastor, speaker or preacher was crucified for you. We don't baptize in the name of any pastor, speaker or preacher and if your church does—run!

These lines of preference crept into baptism also. He listed those he baptized, then added a household too. He also stated that he didn't remember if he baptized anyone else. I know what he's talking about. People have come to me and said, "Don't you remember that you baptized me?" To be honest...I don't. Now I can say Paul doesn't remember either.

We all remember who baptized us because it was a personal moment that meant something. I wanted someone to baptize me, a pastor named Jess Moody, who gave a sermon that directly led to my salvation. However, on the day of my baptism, he could not make it and the associate pastor filled in for him. I remember being disappointed but it taught me a good lesson—Jess Moody didn't save me. I wasn't baptized in his name. I was baptized in the name of Jesus!

In a world of so many voices and personalities, speaking to us in so many way, make sure you find the grace of Jesus Christ in the communication mess. Only his name matters.

Prayer Focus:

- To make sure you are clearly listening only to Jesus
- To show more grace to other speakers
- For others you know who are dangerously stuck on a pastor

Day 3

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 1 Corinthians 1:18

Can there be any piece of woodworking more simple than a cross? Try to imagine a wood shop teacher communicating today's project to the high schoolers.

Teacher: "Today class we're going to make a cross."

Class: "That sounds hard."

Teacher: "It's pretty easy. You take one two-by-four and lay it vertically, then take another two-by-four and lay it horizontally on top, then nail it together like so."

Teacher demonstrates in less than one minute.

Teacher: "Any questions?"

Class: "Why do we have to do this?"

Teacher: "Because I asked you to. If you want a good grade."

Class: "What good is this going to do for me?"

Teacher: "You can hang it in your home. Makes a great conversation piece. Or you can research the meaning behind the cross and change your life."

Teacher is then fired by the school board after outcry from the atheist lawyers saying he violated church and state principles.

Crosses are simple and easy in their construction, but difficult and challenging in terms of their meaning. Be careful communicating that meaning in public today.

Grace in the Mess – 1 Corinthians

When someone wears a cross around their neck on TV, whether a celebrity or politician, it means something today. They are saying, “I believe. I’m saved. I recognize the power of God.”

Those two pieces of wood—one vertical and one horizontal—meet at a single point. That singular point was the most powerful intersection in all of history.

Jesus came from heaven to earth (vertical) and died on a cross for all mankind (horizontal). All life, time and meaning changed at that singular point of interaction.

Why is it foolish? Paul said the reaction of “smart” people to the cross in his day revealed their belief that the cross was foolish. Not the two pieces of wood, but the people who were willing to die for its meaning.

Corinth was located in Greece, where great thinkers like Aristotle, Plato and Socrates taught. The Greeks loved wisdom. They loved to sit around and debate. They looked smart with their words and posture. However, Paul said true wisdom was found in Christ, not Plato.

Then again, some of the greatest scientists were Christian, such as Galileo, Sir Francis Bacon, Sir Isaac Newton, and others. Today, there are people like Stephen Meyer and Hugh Ross that would blow your mind as they reveal the depths of worldly knowledge in light of the heights of Godly wisdom.

Believing in Jesus can be messy and it’s hard to fathom that grace would be foolishness to people who need it most. The hard part for them is getting to the realization that they need grace. Once they do, the cross becomes glorious and wise.

Prayer Focus:

- For opportunities to share the cross with others
- For a deeper understanding of the message
- For those you know who reject the message of the cross

Day 4

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power. 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

On February 3, 1994, at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, Mother Teresa took the stage while President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore (and their wives) looked on with the elite of Washington D.C. This frail, hunched over, 83-year-old nun who dedicated her life to the forgotten women in the slums of India stood before 3,000 people consisting of politicians, Supreme Court Justices and many VIPS. She then lectured them about the horrors of abortion.

“By abortion, the mother does not learn to love, but kills even her own child to solve her problems. [Abortion is] really a war against the child, and I hate the killing of the innocent child, murder by the mother herself. And if we accept that the mother can kill even her own child, how can we tell other people not to kill one another? ... Any country that accepts abortion is not teaching its people to love one another, but to use violence to get what they want. This is why the greatest destroyer of love and peace is abortion.”

The crowd sat stone silent as she spoke, prayed then returned to her seat.

Grace in the Mess – 1 Corinthians

Mother Teresa's entire speech was simple, but direct. At the center of her premise was this message—Jesus loved and received every child and abortion denied Christ.¹

Mother Teresa had spoken before on big stages, even won a Nobel Peace Prize, but she was not known for her speeches. She was known for her actions. She lived in the worst places and loved the world's forgotten people.

She demonstrated the Spirit's power.

Before Paul revealed the truths in this lengthy letter, he wanted to remind everyone that his eloquence did not persuade them to follow Christ and form a church. No, it was the power of the Holy Spirit working in their lives.

We love engaging and interesting communicators. But in the end, is it the delivery of their words that matter? No, it's their heart displayed through their actions when the podium goes away.

Don't be fooled by wise and persuasive speech. Focus on the demonstration of the Spirit's power. Anyone can be a great speaker after receiving training and putting in the hours. But not every speaker is led by the Spirit and reveals God's power.

You may never get that chance to speak from a stage about Jesus Christ but you speak to others at work, home and school on unique platforms given to you by God. Don't worry about how well you present the message.

Make sure you focus everything on Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Prayer Focus:

- For your pastor's sermons
- For your opportunities to speak
- For opportunities to demonstrate the Spirit's power

¹ <https://www.ncregister.com/news/how-mother-teresa-challenged-hillary-clinton-on-abortion>

Day 5

1 Corinthians 2:6-16

For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. 1 Corinthians 2:11-13

Mind readers have entertained us at live shows and on television. They seem to have the ability to know things no one else would know. How do they do it?

Mind reading is a trick that requires some skill. They will force information on you or misdirect the conversation, paying attention to your responses, both verbally and non-verbally (body language). Sometimes they harvest information with spies in the audience or getting you to sign up for their next show on Facebook then peeking at your online information before they come out. They may also force information on you without you knowing it.²

A mentalist uses a combination of psychology, magic tricks, neuro-linguistic programming, sleight of hand, showmanship, and pseudo-psychology to create an environment where it feels like they are able to influence your behaviour and access your thoughts.³

In the book of Genesis, Joseph was in prison when he was asked to interpret the king's dream. But there was a catch—the king didn't release the details of the dream. Uh-oh.

² <https://www.magicianscorner.co.uk/how-do-magicians-read-minds/>

³ <https://fergusflanagan.com/how-mentalists-read-minds/>

Grace in the Mess – 1 Corinthians

Joseph, fully confident in his God, received the information from God and precisely told the king (Pharaoh) the dream and prophetically what it meant, which also all came true.

Human wisdom uses tricks, data, trends, likelihoods, possibilities and misdirection to arrive at conclusions.

Godly wisdom knows the truth.

The Spirit of God lives inside every believer. It is our connection to the heavenly realm. That Spirit knows the thoughts of every human being on the planet, past-present-future, every event that has ever taken place, every word ever spoken.

Human wisdom is limited to what has been learned or observed, possibly through guesses that somehow come true.

Nostradamus was a 16th Century French physician who became a writer of 6,338 prophecies. In five hundred years, odds are some of those predictions may come true. Some have vaguely pointed to the Great Fire in London, the Kennedy assassination, 9/11 and the Coronavirus.⁴

Over three hundred Old Testament prophecies have been fulfilled by Jesus Christ, down to his lineage, birthplace and miracles. Clearly God knows.

While the world may look at Godly wisdom as foolish, following something that is wrong, uninformed or speculative is definitely foolish.

Seek Spirit-taught words and develop the mind of Christ in your life.

Prayer Focus:

- For those deceived by horoscopes, tarot cards, etc.
- For God's wisdom in your daily life
- For the Spirit to speak regarding your future

⁴ <https://www.newsweek.com/nostradamus-predictions-2021-arent-pretty-asteroids-earthquakes-plague-more-1557557>

Day 6

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building. 1 Corinthians 3:7-9

The process a plant goes through from seed to fully grown plant is called germination. A seed sits dormant for a period of time, then as it absorbs water, faces temperature changes, and is exposed to oxygen and light, the seed unleashes a plant from inside that grows and produces fruit.⁵

Explaining the process in such a short amount of time would take pages of information but the biggest takeaway is that it is a process. Farmers understand the process. They know their climate. They know the soil. They know the right timing (seasons).

Everything of value takes time. The building of a home is a process also, sometimes involving so many contractors bringing their specific skills to the process.

I was not a Christian when I attended the University of Georgia from 1980-1984. My parents went to church but Sunday morning was the extent of our spiritual formation. College was an opportunity to run away. A church was located outside my dorm. I could see it from my seventh story window and hear it on Sunday mornings but I never went to church once during that time.

But God planted so many seeds in those four years.

⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/science/germination>

Grace in the Mess – 1 Corinthians

I tried to date a nice girl who said she couldn't have a relationship with someone who wasn't a Christian. There was a group of girls on our dorm floor who were Southern Baptists and showed us so much grace as we drank like fools.

A preacher named Jed Smock visited our rotunda routinely and accused us of being drunkards and fornicators. He wasn't wrong and he created some amusement between classes.

Sometime during those four years, I felt a heavy burden for my sinfulness and wrote a letter to a pastor I found in the yellow pages, who I confessed my sins too. I called him later (no caller I.D. in those days) and asked him if he got my letter. He said he did and graciously said I could be forgiven if I gave my life to Christ. I didn't want that but was glad to hear about the forgiveness part. I left the college experience and moved to Los Angeles fully embracing my sins, but something different was going on inside.

Within a year of moving to California, I gave my life to Jesus. I've tried to find the people who were integral in the seed-planting process of my faith but haven't found them. I wanted to thank them for their role in changing my life.

They have also been significant in the process of the people that I've helped germinate through being a pastor and a writer. Germination leads to germination.

A seed sits through a dormant period of time absorbing water, light and temperature. We don't get angry at a seed for not being a plant overnight. It's the same way with people. Trust the process. Be involved in the process. And let Christ use the process to develop more fruitful followers of him.

Prayer Focus:

- Give thanks for those who influenced your faith
- For your role in the spiritual process
- For your those you are currently helping grow

Day 7

1 Corinthians 3:10-23

If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames. 1 Corinthians 3:12-15

The largest foundation for a building in the world is the Twin Towers of Malaysia, also known as the Petronas Towers. While the building stands at 1,483 feet tall, the foundation is over 400 feet deep. To give some perspective, One World Trade Center is 1,775 feet tall (300 feet taller) with a foundation 150 feet deep (250 feet less).⁶

Why is the foundation so deep for the Malaysian towers? The soil is the problem. This area in Malaysia is known for its black cotton soil which is rich in clay and ideal for farming because it retains water so well. While that's great for farming, it's not for buildings. Black cotton soil expands and shrinks with the weather around it, whether its retaining water or releasing it.

Paul gave advice to the church in Corinth that building contractors would understand—your foundation cannot be influenced by the culture around it. The foundation for Petronas Tower is made of concrete, creating its own, separate culture for a massive pair of buildings to exist on and survive, keeping countless lives safe.

⁶ <https://www.capitalpiling.co.uk/articles/top-five-deepest-foundations>

Grace in the Mess – 1 Corinthians

Paul said the soil of worldly culture consists of gold, silver, costly stones (jewels), wood, hay or straw. There are two extremes in those choices, from the richest to the poorest. The Academy Awards flashes glamor on its red carpet. Many of the world's most beautiful people wear gold, silver and shiny jewels. These are the rewards of their talent.

The farmers of the world come home from a day of work and walk a faded red carpet in their living room covered with wood, hay and straw. These are the rewards of their talents.

None of those elements can withstand fire as seen in the 2025 Southern California blazes which some estimate cost around \$250 billion. Mansions containing gold, silver and jewels and average homes made of wood all burned down. Fire doesn't care.

You know what survived all those fires? The foundations.

Paul told the Corinthians that they were God's temple, walking representations of God himself with the Holy Spirit living inside. They were susceptible to fires lit by foolishness.

He encouraged them to build their lives on wisdom, the rock solid foundation of God.

Do not acclimate to the culture around you, absorbing its values into your foundation.

Keep your foundation separate or it will become a mess. God will show you grace as you rebuild your life on Jesus Christ.

Prayer Focus:

- For those worldly values creeping into your life
- For those Godly principles you know you need
- For protection of your family's foundational values

Day 8

1 Corinthians 4:1-13

To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world—right up to this moment.

1 Corinthians 4:11-13

A scapegoat takes the blame for other people's actions. It's actually a biblical concept.

“When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place, the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall bring forward the live goat. He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the wilderness in the care of someone appointed for the task. The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a remote place; and the man shall release it in the wilderness.

Leviticus 16:20-22

On the Day of Atonement, the high priest took two goats. One died for the sins of the people and the other took on the sins of the people and was released into the wilderness. The blame for the sins of all the people was carried by this wayward goat.

Jesus arrived on earth and both died for the sins of the world and carried the burden of sin with him. We don't have to carry the load. All the focus on the world's animosity falls on him.

Paul started chapter 4 making his case of authority for the words he was about to speak to the church in Corinth. He will say some difficult things but he wanted them to know a few things.

Grace in the Mess – 1 Corinthians

1. He was a servant of God (verse 1)
2. He had been entrusted with the mysteries of God (verse 1)
3. He has proven faithful with that responsibility (verse 2)
4. God will judge him for his words and actions (verse 5)
5. He's not arrogant (verse 6)

In this role Paul had taken he was expecting some difficulty and harsh treatment. It came with the job. History (and legend) say that every one of the apostles died as a result of their faith, by beheading, crucifixion, prison or isolation.

When a person takes on the job of a head football coach, it comes with it some notoriety, power, financial reward, but you will be either considered a hero by sports pundits or be blamed for every problem that team faces. This is the same for politicians, actors, CEOs and pastors. They take all the credit or all the blame. Critics sit comfortably on the sidelines and judge with incomplete information. Paul said God will judge him one day so keep your judgment to yourself.

Christians will be seen as scapegoats for the problems of the world. Our “holier than thou” attitude by trying to “push Christianity” on the world, they say, keeps people from fully enjoying the pleasures of the world.

Paul willingly took that role. He was weakened, dishonored, abused, tortured, homeless, cursed, slandered and seen as scum and garbage. He was okay with that.

Why? Verse 5. “At that time each will receive their praise from God.” The judgment of the world pales in comparison to the judgment of God in the end.

Prayer Focus:

- For those being persecuted for their faith
- For your church leadership and their decisions
- For any heat you make take for your faith

Day 9

1 Corinthians 4:14-21

Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline, or shall I come in love and with a gentle spirit? 1 Corinthians 4:18-21

“He talks a big game.”

The term has come to mean a person who says a lot of flattering, grandiose things and yet reveals nothing on that level in his or hers own life.

“All talk and no action.”

That phrase has similar meaning. Someone’s word makes promises and yet that someone cannot deliver.

Politicians are most notorious for this. Rare that you find one who on the campaign trail says he will do this and that and then do this and that when they get elected into office.

Because of social media and our ability to archive speeches and statements, words come back to haunt us. Be careful what you say because people will remember.

Paul knew in Corinth there was a group of arrogant people in the church talking a big game. They said they knew better. Their ideas, they felt, were more spiritual and their purposes more on-point with God’s will. And yet, something was off.

The fact that Paul called them arrogant gives insight into their motives. They were inflating themselves, magnifying their

Grace in the Mess – 1 Corinthians

position in the church, all the while reducing Christ’s rulership, which Paul always kept first.

Many in the church don’t see all the power grabs that happen behind the scenes. As a young Christian, living in Los Angeles, I became deceived at a church I attended, believing that the pastor had the wrong motives and it was up to me and others to chastise him, while creating a groundswell of criticism to inspire change. We talked a lot but we had no power, no plan, no biblical mandate. We just thought things could be better.

I still remember so many business meetings that were filled with dissension and suspicion. I’ve since apologized to that leadership, mainly seeing what they go through on the other side, being on staff with Family Church since 1997.

Paul clearly said in this section that he would tolerate none of that kind of talk. Threatening to come with a “rod of discipline,” doesn’t sound like grace in the mess, but at least he gave them a choice over how he would arrive at Corinth one day (verse 21).

You can only show grace for a little while until discipline and action needs to follow.

Jesus himself says (threatens) he is coming soon. There’s a foreboding warning in this words, asking us how he will find us when he returns—arrogant or humble? Will he discipline us or greet us with a gentle spirit?

Jesus talks the biggest game and his talk will be followed by action. In the meantime, he shows us grace while we wallow in our mess, but he’s expecting humility when he shows up.

Prayer Focus:

- For your attitude toward others
- For Jesus’ return one day
- For any dissension in your church

Day 10

1 Corinthians 5

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people. 1 Corinthians 5:9-11

In one of the hardest moments of ministry, our church leadership had to fire one of its leaders for sexual immorality. It rocked the staff then the church when our senior pastor announced the incident on Sunday morning.

The response from the congregation was positive (yet sad for those involved). Everyone appreciated that the church took a solid stand and drew the line. We did not tolerate compromise.

We've seen so many ministry leaders in the spotlight fall morally, then take to the cameras to tearfully apologize. Within a year, they find a new church home or TV channel and start again.

Incidents like this bring up all kinds of questions, such as: Why should a church kick someone out for sinning? Shouldn't we be about grace, forgiveness and restoration? Isn't everyone in the church a sinner so how can we judge?

Paul dealt with a similar issue in the Corinthian church. A man was sleeping with his stepmother and those in the church bragged about it. Paul said nope, kick them out.

We find that most people actively engaging in sin of some kind naturally remove themselves from the friendship and love of

Grace in the Mess – 1 Corinthians

Christians, so they don't have to be removed. Some try to keep one foot in both worlds. Is kicking them out the best answer?

When someone is caught sinning and exposed, they are usually repentant. However, are they sorry they got caught or sorry for their sin? It's hard to tell.

There are all kinds of discipline that we impose on our children. One of them is a timeout. A timeout separates the child from the others, removing them from the love and fun of the family. I remember as a kid in elementary school being disciplined at lunch and told to stand with my nose against the wall in the lunchroom. Today the school would be sued for damaging my fragile self-esteem. But I'll tell you this—that discipline worked!

Paul told the church to put the sinners into a timeout, separate them from the others with their noses to the wall. What about grace and forgiveness? This act cannot be done with hate, but with the hope of restoration. We want the sinner to return repentant, changed and more aware of the Holy Spirit in his life.

But aren't we all sinners? Yes, but a follower of Christ identifies himself as anti-sin and pro-holiness. The fact that this church member was committing adultery and everyone was approving showed that they were identifying themselves with sin.

A Christian who is sexually immoral, greedy, an idolater, slanderer, a drunkard or swindler has forgotten who they are. We may have committed those sins but those sins cannot be our identity. Our identity is in Christ (not sin).

Removing one from fellowship is an act of grace. Those involved in our messy incident have restored their marriages and one serves in a thriving ministry. It was the hard thing to do but the best thing to do.

Prayer Focus:

- For those in the church struggling with sin
- For protection of the church leadership from sin
- For grace dealing with immorality in the church

Day 11

1 Corinthians 6:1-11

Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

“Don’t judge me!”

That’s a familiar phrase heard by people who are usually doing something wrong.

We may not like judgment but we need judgment. Judgment not only identifies right from wrong by investigating the truth, but it punishes the wrong through fines and sentencing. Without judgment there’s chaos, everyone doing what they want without fear of consequences. Judgment forces consequences.

Who judges us makes all the difference. At the start of 1 Corinthians 6, Paul heard that people in the church were suing each other in secular courts. Paul found that outrageous. Why should confessing Christians, who know the ultimate truth (Jesus), go to secular courts who know only a limited worldly truth?

It looks bad. Paul said these same Christians will one day judge angels. Now that’s an interesting idea, one we’re not sure exactly how it will work. Will good and bad angels arrive in court with their lawyers (most likely demons—sorry, I couldn’t resist) and plead their case before a Supreme Court of human believers who will vote them out like American Idol?

Grace in the Mess – 1 Corinthians

Or will the judgment be that humans, with limited physical evidence, believed by faith in Jesus while angels, who had all the evidence, rejected God to follow their own selfish desires? Our faith “judges” the angels who had no faith in God. Hard to say.

Either way, Christians should not be suing one another but try to resolve things through mediation.

Paul found it difficult to believe that other fellow Christians were really that bad, committing all kinds of atrocities. Why?

He told the church that sinners would not inherit the kingdom of God. In other words, if you lie, think sexually immoral thoughts, drink too much or cheat on your taxes then you will go to hell. Wait a minute! Don't judge me, Paul! He's not. He's just telling the truth. If you are like me, you hear those words and you doubt your salvation—am I going to heaven to be with Jesus?

Paul reminded them that they were like that at one time. In the past, they identified with their sin. They embraced those sins. However, now they identify with Jesus who gave his life for them. Jesus' life is now their life. Those who go are judged and sentenced to hell choose to pay the penalty for their own sins. Those who accept Jesus' payment on the cross for their sins are judged redeemed (sentence paid).

Paul said, “And that is what some of you were.” Past tense.

Judgment is both good and bad. Judgment convicts and judgment exonerates. If Jesus can forgive us of our sins, can we not forgive one another of our sins?

We can judge if we know the truth and his name is Jesus.

Prayer Focus:

- For your judgment day
- For the judgment day your loved ones will face
- For court cases you may be involved in

Day 12

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Cojoined twins are born physically connected to each other, some partially sharing organs with each other. The odds of twins born this way are one in 50,000. Most cannot survive and yet some can be successfully separated.⁷

Abby and Brittany Hensel are cojoined twins that were born March 7, 1990. They have two heads and one torso. Each has a separate heart, stomach, spine, a pair of lungs and a spinal cord. Each controls one arm and one leg. They eat and write separately and have learned to walk, clap and drive a car. They live in Minnesota and are teachers.

So whatever the one wants to do, the other must join her. Including marriage. In 2021, Abby married Josh Bowling, an Army veteran and registered nurse.⁸

How exactly does that work? These are two separate people with two separate brains and two separate willpowers, in one body. Did Josh marry Brittany also? That would be polygamy, right?

If you think that's hard to imagine, how does a Christian live with the Holy Spirit inside him?

Throughout the Bible, God has worked tirelessly to be with his people. He created mankind and put them in a garden where they existed together. He created a nation so he prosper with them. He became a pillar of smoke and fire to guide them in the desert.

⁷ <https://www.chop.edu/conditions-diseases/conjoined-twins>

⁸ <https://people.com/who-is-josh-bowling-abby-hensel-husband-8718830>

Grace in the Mess – 1 Corinthians

God developed a temple system where he physically manifested himself inside the structure. But mankind pushed God away.

The Old Testament is a story of God wanting to be with his creation but the creation pushed him away. Everything changed in the New Testament. God came to his creation.

Jesus died for our sins making us holy and appropriate for his dwelling inside us. We are now that physical manifestation of the temple. God lives in us!

That's great news. We take God with us wherever we go. To church. Out with the family. To work. And, when we sin.

Paul addressed a messy situation—men sleeping with prostitutes. He analyzed it as a different kind of sin. Not one that happens outside the body but inside. If you lie, steal or kill, you sin outside the body. But sexual sin involves the body, using the body to sin with another person. It's a highly intimate encounter where two become one flesh.

By creating this idea, Paul hoped to make people think twice about this sin. He said in this passage that when a believer in Christ sleeps with the prostitute he takes the Holy Spirit to that bed with him. Never can that be!

When we think of our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit, it changes the way we view sin. It's not a private matter where only one person gets hurt, we are dragging the Holy Spirit into that situation too, just as Abby and Brittany must do everything together, both good and bad.

The Holy Spirit is not our twin, but God himself asking to share an intimate space with someone he loves dearly. He is with you wherever you go.

Prayer Focus:

- For help against sexual sin
- For a closer relationship with the Holy Spirit
- For those you know who struggle with sexual sins

Day 13

1 Corinthians 7:1-16

To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.
1 Corinthians 7:12-14

This section of 1 Corinthians, chapter 7, was written by Paul to a church caught in the cultural undertow that pulled people toward worldly-minded relationships. Paul said to fight against it.

Basically in this passage, Paul is Dr. Phil, giving biblical directives about marriage, sex, divorce and separation. It all gets very messy. Here's an overview of what he has to say:

- Don't have sex with anyone except with your wife.
- A married person's body is not their own and must be surrendered to the other (unless by mutual consent).
- It's okay not to be married (as long as you can control yourself).
- Don't separate except for a period of time that leads to reconciliation.
- Don't divorce.
- A spouse who is a believer must not divorce a spouse who is not a believer.

Grace in the Mess – 1 Corinthians

There's a lot here to break down, but let's focus on the last issue, also known as being unequally yoked. Paul used that phrase in his next letter to the Corinthians.

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 2 Corinthians 6:14

Paul's preference is that two Christians with the same values and beliefs marry and walk through life side-by-side with equal drive and motivation. However, if a Christian marries a non-Christian or a person becomes a Christian during the marriage, their drive and motivation changes and can cause tension, like two oxen yoked together trying to pull the other in another direction.

Paul emphasized that this is not a cause for divorce. He told the follower of Christ to stay in the marriage as long as the other is willing to stay married!

Why? In verse 14, Paul said the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife (and vice versa) and the kids too. What does that mean?

Once Jesus enters any relationship, it changes the dynamic.

It doesn't mean that they are automatically saved and get a fast pass to heaven. It means that the relationship is holy. "Sanctified" means to cleanse, to set apart for a special reason, to deem holy. The goal of the believing spouse is to live a life of Christ-like love to draw the unbeliever (and their kids) to Christ.

It's best to stay in that relationship and show your spouse grace. In return, you should tell them how much God loves them. Stay married, believers, and watch work on your spouse.

Prayer Focus:

- For your unbelieving spouse
- For a relationship you know that is unequally yoked
- For reconciliation of those considering divorce

Day 14

1 Corinthians 7:17-40

Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so. For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord's freed person; similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of human beings. Brothers and sisters, each person, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation they were in when God called them. 1 Corinthians 7:21-24

Do Catholic nuns marry Jesus?

Sort of—yes and no. They take a vow of celibacy and surrender themselves completely to Jesus, just as marriage is a complete and exclusive surrender to one person. But, Jesus isn't married to all these Catholic nuns or that would be polygamy.

They even dress in a manner to show others they are separate from the world, hopelessly devoted to Christ in their lives. They are all in and completely devoted.

Do you have to become a Catholic nun to surrender your life to Jesus? No.

In chapter 7, Paul dove deeply into relationships. Why? Relationships are most effected by our commitment to Christ and they have the greatest effect on our commitment to Christ.

Paul went through a number of scenarios to examine the effect of following Christ:

- Our heritage/traditions (verses 17-20)
- Our jobs/responsibilities (verses 21-24)
- Our marriages/engagements (verses 25-40)

Grace in the Mess – 1 Corinthians

He was telling the church that if they follow Christ, it will impact every relationship to their world.

Paul emphasized freedom and freewill in our relationship decisions. We can marry if we want to. We can *not* marry if we want to.

However, we cannot use our relationship with Christ to sin. We can't divorce for Jesus or run away from our responsibilities for Jesus.

Jesus must become primary over every other relationship we have, but we can't break off all those relationships for Jesus. We must remain as we are.

But if your job is sinful (abortion doctor, nightclub dancer, paid assassin), you might need to find new employment.

A follower of Jesus becomes a slave to Jesus. A slave has no rights, no plans, no purpose other than what Jesus wants for him or her. Paul emphasizes in this section of Chapter 7 to remain as you were when Jesus called you and go/do/move/serve ONLY where Jesus wants you to do.

Every follower of Christ must make those decisions for themselves, not for others. That's where we must show grace. Our commitment to God helps us make sense of our mess and gives us tools to bring order to our mess, however, sometimes we have to make things messier before they become orderly.

God shows us grace as we do that too, recognizing how messy these changes are if we are only doing it for him.

Prayer Focus:

- For your relationship mess
- For decisions you must make
- For the messes others are involved in

Day 15

1 Corinthians 8

*Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge.
1 Corinthians 8:9-11*

A stumbling block is something that impedes, slows or stops a person's progress. A person gets "tripped up." It's not a wall or stop sign, but it can put up a wall in a person's heart.

What are some things that Christians thought were stumbling blocks in recent times?

- Dancing
- Drinking
- Smoking
- Going to movies
- Card playing / gambling
- Rock 'n roll
- Drums and guitars during worship

Were people right? Are those things that should be avoided? Paul in chapter 8 specifically addressed food sacrificed to idols. Now in those days when you went to the market to buy food, the vendors sold their meat but a lot of it came from the local god temple where animals were sacrificed. You could be eating meat sacrificed to false gods.

Paul responded by saying we (he and church) knew the truth about idols (verses 1-2). Idols are not real (verse 4). There is only one God, the Father, and Lord, Jesus Christ. (verses 5-6).

Grace in the Mess – 1 Corinthians

But he continued by saying not everyone knows this. Some have routinely eaten sacrificed meat and know the one true God. Now they feel terrible about eating sacrificial meat, believing they are ingesting these gods and approving of their power (verse 7). Paul said food doesn't bring us nearer to God (verse 8).

So if that new or weaker Christian with an immature or undeveloped faith sees someone eating idol-sacrificed meat, one of two things could happen. One, fear and disdain rises up inside them, creating walls of judgment between believers. Or two, they return to the worship of idols, falling away from the church. Paul said it's better not to eat at all then cause any reactions.

Is it wrong to dance, drink, smoke, watch movies, play cards, listen to rock and play drums? No, not if they're done in moderation and with discernment.

Could doing those things cause others to fall into traps and fall away from God? Maybe. Unfortunately we have no control over who sees us in a restaurant while we enjoy a bottle of beer with friends. In England, nobody would flinch. In America, hairs flinch on the back of necks. Even if that beer is non-alcoholic. As a pastor, I'm totally aware of who sees me in public. People's reactions could vary:

- “Oh, he listens to Led Zeppelin, then I guess I can listen to Marilyn Manson.”
- “Oh, he has wine with his meal, then I guess I can drink a six pack when I get home.”
- “Oh, he plays Uno, then I guess I can go to Vegas and play blackjack.”

You may have a stronger faith and outside influences cannot alter or weaken it one bit. But, you can't control the faith of those who are watching you, starting with your children.

Prayer Focus:

- For areas of your life where you are weak
- For stumbling blocks in your family
- For your family's faith

Day 16

1 Corinthians 9:1-18

*But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me, for I would rather die than allow anyone to deprive me of this boast. For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me.
1 Corinthians 9:15-17*

What did you want to be when you grew up? A survey once asked teenagers what they want to be when they grow up.

Teen boys

- Professional athlete – 12%
- YouTuber/Streamer – 11%
- Musician – 6%
- Professional gamer – 6%
- Doctor/nurse – 5%

Teen girls

- Doctor/nurse – 13%
- Actress – 11%
- Musician – 9%
- Artist – 7%
- YouTuber/Streamer – 6%⁹

There are problems with many of these jobs. One, we don't really need them as a society to advance (sorry gamers, actresses). Two, there's a very limited availability for them to succeed. Do we

⁹ <https://www.statista.com/chart/31014/most-popular-future-jobs-with-united-states-teenagers/>

Grace in the Mess – 1 Corinthians

really need another podcast? Three, many of them live or die with fickle trends and appetites. How many bands live beyond a one-hit wonder? The career for an athlete can be over with a single injury.

Of all of these, doctors and nurses are very much needed, in high demand and they are paid well. Just one problem—it's expensive and time-consuming to be in that profession. Plus, you have to be really, really smart which limits many of us.

But if you really, really want to be something, and you feel called, you wake up every day thinking about that thing, and you receive a good response when you do that thing...then you should probably do that for a living.

Ever since I was in seventh grade I wanted to be a writer, fifty years later, that's what I'm doing. I can't imagine a day going by that I don't write. One hundred books later I'm doing what I wanted to do.

Some define their passion with this—I would do it even if I never got paid for it. That's a good qualifier. Paul said he would do all he did for free. He would rather die than not do what he was doing. He said he was compelled, pushed and entrusted with an obligation to preach. He had to do it. And he said all that even after being beaten, maligned, hated and hunted. Some YouTubers give up after one negative comment.

Paul felt he deserved some compensation for his efforts and he was right. There should be financial compensation for those who follow God's prompting. But are only pastors and church employees called by God to do what they do?

No. God even calls some to be YouTubers, gamers, actresses, athletes and artists—for HIS glory.

Prayer Focus:

- For your work
- For your future
- For your calling

Day 17

1 Corinthians 9:19-27

Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. 1 Corinthians 9:19-22

Our senior pastor and I were asked to do a funeral for someone in our church who died of ALS. Watching that happen to someone, no matter who that person is, was so difficult. It's a merciless disease. When he talked about his impending funeral service, he made a joke, "I want you guys wear Florida Gator colors." He was a huge Gator fan. I'm a Georgia Bulldog alum and Chuck, our senior pastor, is a huge LSU fan. We laughed at our friend's request but inside we threw up in our mouths.

The funeral arrived and so did two Florida Gator ties for us to wear. We put our preferences and our pride aside and for a few hours we became Florida Gators to reach Gator fans.

This is an extreme story to what Paul is talking about here, but it applies to his point. We should be willing to do whatever it takes to reach someone for Jesus Christ.

So what does it mean to become someone to reach someone? Should I become a sinner to reach sinners? No. But I can become like someone culturally, intellectually, favorably and location-wise to reach people for Christ. Paul said he would think

Grace in the Mess – 1 Corinthians

like a Jew under the law or learn Greek philosophies or study Roman culture, just to reach all of them for Christ.

I went to the University of Georgia. I can have an in-roads to reach Bulldog fans. I grew up in Pennsylvania which immediately builds bridges to those who love soft pretzels and cheesesteaks. I've worked in the entertainment industry, which opens up conversations and connections.

I also struggled with alcohol and drugs so I can talk to those who struggle with the same sins. I must use my weakness to "become weak" to reach that weak person going through similar experiences. I can't be a Jew but I've been to Israel. I've not been a slave but I've worked for some terrible bosses. I was not a believer for 22 years of my life and I still remember my struggles and excuses \ so I can relate to non-believers.

Paul ends this section using a sports metaphor, two sports I know nothing about—running and boxing. However, I played some sports and watch sports, so I get it.

He's reminding us that there is a finish line out there. One day we will cross it. It's the transition between life and afterlife. Paul challenges us to race toward it as if you were receiving a "forever" prize, eternal.

If that's true, why aren't we competing to win others to Jesus in this lifetime? Runners have to become runners. Boxers have to become boxers. How? Through hard work, training, focus, learning, growing. If as a believer I'm called to reach others, then am I training to become a witness, using my testimony and experiences to become who God allowed me to be to reach some?

Don't be an aimless Christian that runs like a drunk and punches the air. That's a messy life! Live to win and tell others about the grace you were shown.

Prayer Focus:

- For your work
- For your future
- For your calling

Day 18

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.
1 Corinthians 10:13

On many an occasion, it's been said, "God won't give me more than I can handle." They were actually misquoting this verse, 1 Corinthians 10:13.

It's a lie to think God won't give you more than you can handle. Ask anyone who has received a cancer diagnosis or just heard that their child has died or that their spouse has been cheating. That's a lot for person to handle!

God promises to know our situation, be with us and strengthen us because he knows life throws us burdens that we can't handle alone. We need the Holy Spirit, the church, our family and a small group to get us through those tough times. God promises to be with you so can handle the situation with him.

But this verse is really about temptation.

Reading the context of this chapter, Paul addressed the Israelites in the past. They saw the same God. They ate his food. They witnessed his miracles...and yet they sinned and died in the wilderness. Why did that happen?

They sinned after giving in to temptation. Most of that temptation centered around idolatry, worshipping other gods and practicing evil religious practices such as having sex with temple prostitutes. This sin led to their death.

All sin leads to death.

Grace in the Mess – 1 Corinthians

Paul called these incidents in the past “examples” we can learn from and “warnings” to avoid.

When you fly, you know all about the flight attendant’s pre-flight safety talk. They usually talk about:

- Seat belts
- Emergency exits
- Cabin pressure
- Life rafts
- The safety card in the seat pocket right in front of you

I always stop what I am doing to listen. Usually I’m sitting in an emergency exit and I’ve determined before we take off that if we crash that I will be a leader and help people get to safety. I’ve yet to be tested in my resolution.

The pre-flight safety talk tells us a number of things about our own lives:

- We may crash...
- But there’s a way out...
- If we read the safety card and know what to do.

Temptation attempts to crash our plane and cause our death. However, there’s always a way out of temptation. Just read the manual. It’s right there in front of you. When you feel the temptation strike:

- Pray
- Read scripture
- Run away
- Tell someone you trust to pray (friend, family, small group)

Know what to do in a spiritual emergency. Temptation and sin are messy but God provides a way out through his grace.

Prayer Focus:

- For temptations you struggle with
- For an emergency evacuation plan
- For healing

Day 19

1 Corinthians 10:14-33

“I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but not everything is constructive. No one should seek their own good, but the good of others. 1 Corinthians 10:23-24

As a teenager, I remember so badly wanting to be free of my parent’s rules. They tried to tell me when to be home at night. They gave me chores to do around the house. They told me to get good grades...or else. Such an oppressive environment! All the things I later ended up telling my own kids to do...

My definition of freedom in my teens was living with no rules. Well let’s be clear—without other people’s rules. I wanted to live by my rules. Freedom for me came when I went off to college. I ate what I wanted. I came home at night when I wanted. I still got good grades, but I wanted to get good grades. That was my decision, not my parents.

Was I free to do whatever I wanted? Yes, but I put on weight, drank too much and to this day my most regrettable sins were committed during that time. My behavior back then was not beneficial to anyone and not constructive either. Not even to myself. Freedom can be bad without rules.

When God got ahold of me, I felt his love for me and surrendered to him. I then remember hearing phrases like “freedom in Christ” and wondering what that meant.

I grew up in the Philadelphia area, so the Liberty Bell, the signing of the Declaration of Independence, 1776 were important concepts because the birth of our nation started there. It’s when we as a nation became free from the tyranny of England. Were we free to do whatever we wanted? No. We still had laws.

Grace in the Mess – 1 Corinthians

We were free *from* something but not free *to do* whatever we wanted. America unchained itself from England and established its own set of rules.

What I realized over time with my faith is that I unchained myself from my destructive tyranny and established a new set of rules in my life—according to God’s way to live.

Never do we have a right to do anything we want. Our heart and will are evil, desiring the worst from others as we seek the best for ourselves. So why do we think that we have “freedom in Christ” to do whatever we want?

“Freedom in Christ” means we are unchained from the world which was dragging us to death. We discover freedom *from* the world and now we are free *to* live like Christ.

Everything I do as a Christian goes through a filter. Not a “me” filter but a Jesus filter.

What is that filter? Is what I’m about to do showing God I love him and does it show love to others?

In this chapter, Paul instructed the church on their consummation of food from idol sacrifices. A Christian had freedom to eat that food because idols were nothing. Who it was sacrificed to made no difference. There is only one God!

But since it raised questions in other people’s minds, Paul said don’t do it. It wasn’t beneficial or constructive to help others understand God and commit themselves to him. We can’t control how other people will think, but we can control the circumstances which cause them to think.

Paul said just do everything for the glory of God. That’s the best filter to live by. Do your best so others can be saved.

Prayer Focus:

- For your witness to unbelievers
- For your freedom in Christ
- For those things that could be misinterpreted by others

Day 20

1 Corinthians 11:1-16

Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved. For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head. 1 Corinthians 11:4-6

Colin Kaepernick was a quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers, taking them to the Super Bowl once. During the preseason in 2016, Kaepernick sat during the playing of the national anthem. He considered it a protest against racial injustice, police brutality and oppression. When the season started, Kaepernick kneeled during the anthem. People were outraged especially when other athletes in other sports followed him and knelt also.

The outcry reached such a fevered pitch that Kaepernick could not secure a place on any team. He was not welcomed in any city. As I searched his name on the internet, it described him as an American Civil Rights Activist and not as a quarterback. It's a fascinating study in freedom. Kaepernick as an American has freedom to express his point of view and yet others thought he didn't have that right because they found his posture disrespectful.

I go to a men's group on Friday mornings at 7:00 am. I get up at 5:00 am to write, then make my way to the meeting. Most times I take a shower, but not every time. If you see me that early and I'm wearing a hat, just know that I didn't take a shower. When the group stops to pray, I'm hit with a crises decision—do I remove my hat and reveal my follicle disarray or keep it on and present my best self to others? Thankfully, their eyes are closed so they either don't see my hair or my defiant stance.

Grace in the Mess – 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 11:1-16 contains some of the hardest verses to understand in the Bible. One commentator (Ellicott) said verses 10-11 were the hardest to interpret in the entire New Testament.

Paul in his other letters dealt with some Jews who said a Christian needed to become Jewish first through circumcision before becoming a Christian. If Paul called any such rule heresy, why would he demand head coverings or no head coverings?

The Bible recognizes regional customs and does not try to override them when applicable. In the Greek culture, the head covering represented authority in marriage. A married woman in public covered her head as a sign of being “under” the authority of a husband (like a wedding ring). A prostitute, for example, uncovered her head to show she was available. However, in Jewish culture, a person covered their heads to show they were under the authority of God, such as the yarmulkas Jewish men wear today. The Catholic pope wears a mitre to show that he has authority. He doesn’t remove it to pray. So which culture do you follow?

The Corinthian church was trying to reach Greek and Roman people, so Paul sided with that culture. Paul recognized that we are all under the authority of God, it all comes from him. Greek culture also gave women more authority which made their acceptance of biblical marriage difficult.

There were also attempts in that Corinthian culture to bend genders like we see now. Men wore long hair to show a more feminine side (verse 14). Paul said oppose that cultural trend. God created us male and female!

So in America, we should stand for the National Anthem and remove our hats when we pray. It’s the culture. But we shouldn’t promote fads, trends and agendas just because the culture approves. Oppose anything cultural that opposes God’s order.

Prayer Focus:

- For wisdom in dealing with your culture
- For your church’s relationship with culture
- For recognizing authority in your life

Day 21

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

*For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.
1 Corinthians 11:23-26*

Growing up Lutheran, a big moment in my life was going through confirmation. Around seventh and eighth grade, my parents informed me that I had to go to church on Wednesday nights where forty or so students sat in a room while a couple adults said things which sounded like Charlie Brown's teacher, Miss Othmar. Whaa-whaa-whaaaa.

They talked about some kind of spiritual gibberish that made no sense to me. I took notes because there was a test and you had to pass the test to pass the class. When I did pass, they put a robe on me and I walked us all into church in a straight line. We lined up at the altar and took communion for the first time.

I wonder if the apostles had to pass a test when they took their first communion that Passover night? Right, Judas?

The whole thing worked out because my parents threw a party, a bunch of friends came over and they brought me gifts, mostly money. So I learned that communion is profitable!

Since then I've learned that every church has its own set of communion rules. Some observe communion weekly, monthly or every so often. Some use real bread and real wine while others use Welch's Grape Juice and some kind of chewy cardboard. Some

Grace in the Mess – 1 Corinthians

have the communion delivered to them in the pew, while others have to walk up front and get it. Some are fed by a priest while others enjoy self-service.

What's the right way to experience communion? Here are Paul's Seven Communion Rules outlined in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 that appear to be non-negotiable:

1. Communion should be enjoyed together to express unity.
2. Communion is not a meal, but an observance of Christ's love and sacrifice.
3. We must remember that the bread represents the body of Christ broken then given to all of us.
4. We must remember that the cup (juice/wine) represents the blood of Christ spilled for all of us.
5. Communion represents a new covenant or promise to us, based on Jesus, not the temple practices.
6. We must celebrate communion until Jesus returns and use it as a reminder that he will come back.
7. Communion must be a time of reflection and confession.

In Paul's day, they misused the time of communion, turning it into a party, with plenty of eating and drinking. They didn't invite everyone to their parties and developed cliques, which completely missed the point of communion—which clearly means common/union.

You can tell a lot about a church through their practice of communion and a lot about a person when they take communion.

You discover how important Jesus is by how someone experiences communion.

Communion helps us grow closer to Christ while we all grow closer to each other.

Prayer Focus:

- For your next communion experience
- Take time to examine yourself
- For your children's experience with communion

Day 22

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

When I was a kid at Christmas, the greatest moment that kicked off the Christmas season was the arrival of the Sears Christmas catalog. You see, kids, in those days you had to go to the store to buy your presents, not have them delivered to your front porch. This was before Black Fridays and the internet.

I would go through that 600-page catalog and turn to the back, usually about two-thirds, which is where the toys were. Then I made my list, circling them with a pen and dog-eared the pages. My parents needed to do precisely what I wanted. Later, I got greedy and played a game called, “If You Could Have One Thing on This Page What Would It Be?”

Thankfully, my parents didn’t buy me all those toys but they gave me enough and by post-Christmas I forgot what I had circled. God equally knows what gifts to give us.

Spiritual gifts are different from the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). With the Holy Spirit living in you as a believer, he brings his personality and strengths with him then manifests them through you. “Fruits of the Spirit” impact your personality, demeanor and attitude. “Spiritual gifts” impact your ability to do the work of the Spirit on earth.

When you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, the Holy Spirit comes and lives inside you, bringing you into the family. The Spirit becomes your connection to God, guiding you,

Grace in the Mess – 1 Corinthians

protecting you and using you for God’s service. There are different gifts and everyone has a different mixture of them. All of them are working for the same God. In that sense, you become a part of God’s workforce, with jobs to do for his kingdom.

A spiritual gift is the manifestation of the Spirit in you for everyone’s good, to bring the message of hope to the world. These gifts are distributed to all believers, determined by God. God knows who you can reach and how you can reach them. He’s designed you to be a part of the bigger picture in a very precise time and place. Some of those gifts (found in 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12 and Ephesians 4) are:

Wisdom	Prophecy	Leadership
Knowledge	Discernment	Mercy
Teaching	Encouragement	Giving
Evangelism	Administration	Shepherding
Faith	Serving	Helps
Healing	Tongues	
Miracles	Interpretation of tongues	

Do you need to know what your spiritual gift is? Not really, but it’s helpful. Spiritual gift tests encourage and confirm something you probably already sensed in you. The key is to do what you feel God calling you to do and you’ll see it clearly.

The Holy Spirit distributes these gifts like a boss at a major corporation. You don’t need everyone in leadership or everyone in customer service or everyone in software development. That’s messy and only some work would get done. You need people at different levels, with different skills, reaching different people, all for the same reason—to glorify Jesus Christ.

As a believer you have a role in the body of Christ and a job to do.

Prayer Focus:

- For God to use your spiritual gift
- For a greater opportunity to use that gift
- Showing appreciation for those gifted around you

Day 23

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

For just as the body is one and has many parts, and all the parts of that body, though many, are one body—so also is Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and we were all given one Spirit to drink. Indeed, the body is not one part but many. 1 Corinthians 12:12-14

I was all alone at our apartment in Sherman Oaks, California. I had just come home from work and my wife was at the store with our two kids, one a newborn.

I was watching TV when all of a sudden a pain hit me. I imagine it was how one feels getting stabbed, then having the knife twisted inside you. I fell to the floor. Now this was before cell phones, so I crawled to our landline in the apartment and called my neighbors upstairs.

“Help, there’s something wrong. The pain is terrible,” I gasped. “Troy, you’re always kidding around!” our neighbor said and hung up. Being a class clown has its drawbacks.

Then I called my in-laws who lived 30 minutes away. They took me more seriously and raced over. By this time my neighbors began to rethink my desperation and came downstairs. Now my in-laws had arrived and my wife. They drove me to the hospital.

My appendix had burst and I immediately went in for surgery. The surgery was not done right and it required two more surgeries that month and put me in the hospital for a total of 28 days. Some nurses said I nearly died. For what? An appendix?

The appendix is a dead-end tube located where the small intestine and large intestine meet. It’s doesn’t transport anything and seems to have no function at all. People without an appendix

live healthy lives. So why do we have an appendix that can kill you? Did God make a mistake in our development? Obviously not.

The answer is doctors aren't entirely sure. The best reason for the appendix researchers believe is that it produces good bacteria that help with our intestine's health. However, if it gets infected and inflamed, it causes severe pain.¹⁰

The body of Christ (aka the church) is made up of many parts. There's unity and diversity in the body. That body has certain roles that God has given them to support the body. Everything from the pastor to the support staff, to the Kids Ministry teacher, to the facilities people, to the greeter, to the sound tech to the worship leader. We need diversity.

If everyone was on the coffee team, we would just stand around and drink good coffee. If everyone was on the greeting team, everyone would feel welcomed but have nothing to go to. We need diversity. Try to imagine going to service without coffee or without anyone saying "Hi, glad you're here." You might get a great sermon with incredible music, but you feel empty walking in.

We can't all be the same part of the body, just as we only have two eyes, two ears and one mouth. However, when that one little obscure appendix decides to call it quits, the whole body suffers and works together to bring healing. The appendix is weak, less honorable and disrespected—nobody knows what it does. But there's a reason for it and maybe only God knows why.

Sunday mornings can be messy. You have the opportunity to serve and show grace to someone coming to church who needs healing. Find your place in the body.

Prayer Focus:

- For your current position serving at the church
- For a new position you may be called to
- For those serving on staff

¹⁰ <https://www.wtamu.edu/~cbaird/sq/2013/10/02/why-do-humans-have-an-appendix-even-though-it-is-unnecessary/>

Day 24

1 Corinthians 13:1-8

Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy, is not boastful, is not arrogant, is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not irritable, and does not keep a record of wrongs. Love finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

What is love? In 1993, a Trinidadian-German singer named Haddaway released his debut single from his debut album known simply as “The Album.” His song “What is Love” hit number one in 13 countries, topping the charts in Germany, Britain, Australia, Canada and the United States.

So how does Haddaway answer that question?

*What is love?
Oh, baby, don't hurt me
Don't hurt me no more*

Haddaway begs for a response of love because of his love of another. This person’s lack of interest is killing him. He doesn’t know what else to say or what else to do. He wants no one else and he needs that person forever. Sound like love?

These verses in 1 Corinthians 13 are very popular at weddings, mine included, trying to explain what brought these two people together and what will help them to explore this love in years to come. But this love actually explains God’s love for us. The Greek word used here is *agape*, the strongest sense of unconditional love the Bible expresses as God’s love for us.

Love cannot be summed up in one word or an easy sentence. Paul tried to simply explain love in 1 Corinthians 13 but needed five verses. If we truly love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:30), then this is how we

Grace in the Mess – 1 Corinthians

love others as we want to be loved ourselves. Paul showed that love as multi-faceted, multi-dimensional and defined love with sixteen different points, seven of them positive “is” and “does” definitions and nine of them negative “does not” explanations. Love is not only what you do, but what you don’t do. If you do and don’t do these things, you’ll discover the depths of love.

1. Patient
2. Kind
3. Does not envy
4. Does not boast
5. Is not proud
6. Does not dishonor others
7. Is not self-seeking
8. Is not easily angered
9. Does not keep records of wrongs
10. Does not delight in evil
11. Rejoices in truth
12. Always protects
13. Always trusts
14. Always hopes
15. Always perseveres
16. Does not fail

The main point being made by this section is that love must not be about you. You can replace “love” in this section with “God” and understand how God loves you. *God is patient, God is kind, etc.* He asks you to embrace that love then to be that example of love to others by replacing your name with love. *I am patient, I am kind, etc.* In other words, love is selfless.

Love is also hard and despite what Haddaway thinks, it’s willing to be hurt in all the mess, to the point of self-sacrifice for another. Jesus was willing to die for love.

Prayer Focus:

- For expressing true love to your spouse/family
- For expressing that love to others around you
- To embrace God’s love for you

Day 25

1 Corinthians 13:8-13

*For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.
1 Corinthians 13:12-13*

The Peter Pan Syndrome is a psychology term to describe people who never mature socially. They refuse to grow up so they hold on childish things. Usually they refuse to accept responsibility and make decisions in their life.

When a person reaches high school, they have a decision to make as to whether or not they will begin to move out of their parents' house and create their own life. We know of a 70-year old woman who remained in her parents' house until they both died and now struggles because she can't figure out how to live on her own. Her siblings moved on to successful careers and families and she has nothing. Her love never matured beyond mom and dad.

In chapter 13, Paul transitions from verses 8-10 to 11-13 where he talks about maturing, using our natural growth as a central metaphor. Children think like children. Adults think like adults. While our bodies grow and our minds expand, our concept of love matures also. We experience love and show love while love challenges us and motivates us.

Paul talked about the power of love. He said it never fails. If it does fail for lack of effort or care, then it really wasn't love, right? Love must be central to everything, because it's a powerful motivational force.

After just coming off a talk about spiritual gifts (such as prophecies, tongues and knowledge), Paul said those will cease at one time. What is he talking about? He said spiritual gifts will stop

Grace in the Mess – 1 Corinthians

when “completeness comes.” Our completeness is our resurrection into the presence of God. We won’t need any of the spiritual gifts because we will be dwelling with the triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—and there will no longer be any need to reach people for Christ.

He's not saying those gifts are useless, just that they will expire one day and only one thing will remain.

Love.

When we graduate to heaven, we will be with love, in love and existing because of love. That’s the ultimate finish line. The final maturation of love.

Right now, from our vantage point, we don’t really see the whole picture. It’s like a reflection in the mirror. We see in part but not the whole. We see what we want to see. Paul wants us to expand our capacity love to greater measures, growing closer to a heavenly perspective of love.

Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. (Verse 12)

Our maturity in life is based on our capacity to love others more than ourselves. Peter Pans live in fear so they gravitate to their selfish needs. People stay in their parents’ house because their parents meet all their needs. It’s a safe love but it only satisfies them.

Faith trusts. Hope drives. Love grows.

To be what God wants you to be in this messy world, you must learn to love in a greater way, expanding beyond your needs to loving others as God loves them. That’s also called grace.

Prayer Focus:

- To evaluate your capacity for love
- To ask what you can do to love better
- To be willing to have your love challenged

Day 26

1 Corinthians 14:1-25

Pursue love and desire spiritual gifts, and especially that you may prophesy. For the person who speaks in a tongue is not speaking to people but to God, since no one understands him; he speaks mysteries in the Spirit. On the other hand, the person who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouragement, and consolation. The person who speaks in a tongue builds himself up, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. I wish all of you spoke in tongues, but even more that you prophesied. The person who prophesies is greater than the person who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets so that the church may be built up.
1 Corinthians 14:4-8

What superpower do you wish you had? Super-strength? Super-fast? Invisibility? Mind-control?

For me, these days as I get older, it's Super Memory! Not just to remember where I left my car keys, but to remember events from my life, books I've read, movies I've seen and Bible passages. Now I seem to forget things faster than I remember them. I'm also mindful that I'm quick to forget the bad things too so that weakness does have a benefit.

I must admit when I wrestle with that question, every superpower I desire benefits me more than anyone else. I want to put others at a disadvantage and give me the advantage, to highlight my ability and put me in a better light.

Paul talked about three spiritual gifts in this passage that many churches try to keep at arm's length.

- Prophecy – Speaking a command of truth.
- Tongues – Speaking in an unintelligible language.

Grace in the Mess – 1 Corinthians

- Interpretation of Tongues – The ability to interpret that unintelligible language.

Why do churches dismiss these spiritual gifts while embracing the others? Could be out of fear, ignorance or a lack of control. Each of them were abilities to hear directly from God and understand what he wanted from them. That's scary!

However, for the church in Corinth, it appears their worship services were getting messy. Everybody was standing up and declaring some truth, or speaking gibberish with no interpreter to decipher a deeper spiritual message. It was out of control.

Having a spiritual gift became a selfish badge of honor. Paul, in this section, was saying while those gifts are good, tongues seemed to be getting out of hand. All these voices crying out in gibberish. Paul worried about the guest visiting the church for the first time and wondering what these lunatics were saying!

Here's what Paul had to say about speaking in tongues:

*I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you; yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, in order to teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.
1 Corinthians 14:18-19*

The spectacle and mystery of God is a wonderful thing to behold, but it must be cautioned with intention. We must ask ourselves—am I using my spiritual gift for my glory or for God's glory? If you desire the smallest hint of glory in using your gift, then it's probably best to temper it.

Always seek to glorify God and edify the church, strengthening, encouraging and comforting them by showing them grace in this messy world.

Prayer Focus:

- For God to use your spiritual gift
- For your intention in using your spiritual gift
- For order in your church services

Day 27

1 Corinthians 14:26-40

*...the women should be silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak, but are to submit themselves, as the law also says. If they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home, since it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. Or did the word of God originate from you, or did it come to you only?
1 Corinthians 14:34-36*

If you've ever been to church in a different country, you know that the rules of church are much different from place to place. In Africa, people have very few sets of clothes to choose from. You can see a person in the same shirt for a week. However, on Sunday, they suddenly have a glorious suit and a colorful tie.

How about taking up the offering? American churches are doing away with passing the plate, but in Africa, they dance to the front of the church to put their coins in a collection box.

One time, I delivered a message to a small village in Tanzania, where everyone came out, stopping whatever they were doing. The front row was stacked with women breast feeding their baby without any shame!

Another time, while in Brazil, church was going on while children and chickens ran up and down the aisles.

In America, we expect a certain sense of decorum and respect in large gatherings. No talking. Listen or at least pretend to listen. Save your interactions for later.

The church in Corinth wrestled with their own issues of expectations in public gatherings. Remember, the church was relatively new and did not have centuries of rules to build on. Roman and Greek gatherings turned into debates or discussions in an open forum. It was more lively.

Grace in the Mess – 1 Corinthians

Paul tried to temper the cultural norms. He started by addressing the “tongues” issue and making sure things were done a spiritually orderly way. He didn’t want to douse passion, but increase the focus on truth. On the other hand, our American church services can be too orderly, too predictable. As a staff we try to fight routine, then generally fall back into it. The Holy Spirit likes to surprise us at times and we need to be flexible for his prompting.

In addition to the disorder caused by spiritually gifted attention seekers in Corinth, there seemed to be a problem with the women in the congregation. Paul said they should remain silent in church, be in submission and go home to ask their questions. Maybe they didn’t understand the decorum. Maybe they were so excited to get out of the house finally!

A Greek or Roman woman in the first century had no rights, no ownership and primarily stayed at home performing domestic duties. Some women, like Priscilla or Lydia mentioned in the New Testament, had home businesses so they could be industrious. Paul worked with plenty of women in ministry so he certainly appreciated their value.

The only time women were involved with religion back in Corinth was during temple prostitution. But Christianity freed them of this stereotype and they were invited to be equal sharers in the grace of God.

There will always be social, societal and respectful norms people need to adhere to whenever they gather. Just like churches all over the world, each one has their own decorum and rules for personal engagement. Paul wanted order according to social standards but in no way did it diminish God’s love and value of women. Remember, the first person to witness the risen savior was a woman.

Prayer Focus:

- For order and respect in your church services
- For men and women to feel valued in their roles
- For home interaction regarding spiritual matters.

Day 28

1 Corinthians 15:1-34

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

If Jesus did not walk out of that tomb, then put this book down and go grab a few drinks at the bar. You might as well party all day and sin the night away.

Go ahead and cheat on your taxes. Randomly slap your neighbor in the face and kick his dog. Order an expensive meal at a restaurant and run out before the bill comes. Sneak into a second movie at the theater. Steal cable. What does it matter, there are no consequences, at least not in eternity.

BUT, if Christ did step out of that grave after three days dead, just as he said he would, then everything changes. We no longer live for the selfish here and now, but for God's eternity.

Paul, in probably the most pivotal chapter in 1 Corinthians (some say the Bible), clearly made the case for the resurrection. First, he gave evidence...

OVER 500 PEOPLE saw the risen savior three days after dying on Roman's most deadly execution device—the cross. That

Grace in the Mess – 1 Corinthians

includes the apostle Peter and others, five hundred people who became believers, James the (half) brother of Christ and Paul himself. Paul's encounter with Jesus was a calling to stop persecuting the church and start planting them instead.

So if Christ was raised from the dead, then...

- We will likewise be raised from the dead (verse 12)
- Our preaching and evangelism have purpose (verse 14)
- Our faith in his resurrection has sustenance (verse 17)
- His sacrifice of death cleanses us of all sins (verse 17)
- Those who have died before us are not lost (verse 18)
- We have hope (verse 19)

Jesus is the “firstfruit,” the first of many who are asleep (a euphemism for death). A firstfruit was an offering given for the forgiveness of sins. It was the first and best of your crop. Jesus was the best all humankind could offer as a sacrifice for our sins. That term means he was the first to be resurrected, the best to be offered and a sacrifice for the elimination of sin.

Because of the resurrection, death has been destroyed, breaking the generational curse of Adam. Adam's sin passed down to every descendant. No one born on earth could ever escape that curse of death for sins.

Here comes Jesus who passes on life to those that accept it and believe it, breaking the curse because he conquered the punishment of the curse—death itself.

If there is no resurrection, Paul quotes Isaiah 22:13: “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” But if there is a resurrection, then believe and go tell it on the mountain so others may live.

Prayer Focus:

- Do you believe Jesus was resurrected?
- Do you believe you will be resurrected?
- For opportunities to tell others about the resurrection.

Day 29

1 Corinthians 15:35-58

*I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.
1 Corinthians 15:50-53*

Death is messy. Some people's deaths are prolonged, battling through therapies, rehab and lengthy hospital stays. Some descend into the dementia, Alzheimer's or ALS. Cancer strikes kids and moms, singles and married, young and old. We all hate it, but we can't avoid it.

While death may be messy, God shows us grace. He has a plan for our life and our death and he wants us to know about it.

In farming, something has to be planted in order to come to life. A dead seed can do nothing until it is put in the ground, watered, then it bursts forth and reaches for the sky, becoming something very different and very life-giving, like wheat.

Paul said when we die and are "planted" in the ground, these human bodies that failed us and frustrated us are the perishable seeds that transition into a new life that burst out of the earth and reach for the heavens (verses 36-37).

The dead are raised into a heavenly body. Earthly bodies are perishable, dishonorable, weak, but they will be raised into imperishable, glorious, strong and spiritual bodies (verses 42-44) for eternity.

Grace in the Mess – 1 Corinthians

We know what will happen, but, how does it happen?

Adam started a chain reaction throughout time. His sin transitioned the human existence from spiritual to natural. The natural man knows the earth and plays in its dust. He desires to know the earth, loves it and is willing to die for it and be buried in it. That natural man cannot inherit the kingdom of God, that spiritual realm that exists beyond flesh and blood.

Jesus came from heaven to earth to point the earth to heaven. While the destiny of earth is nothing but dust and death, the future of heaven is spirit and life.

We choose whose image we wish to reflect—Adam or Jesus. Adam does not love you and will do nothing for you. Jesus though does love you and died for you to show you there's hope and joy after death.

His resurrection from the dead was the first that foreshadows a moment when all resurrections will happen. Right now, the dead are spirits, waiting with God for the moment Jesus returns to earth one last time. This moment will complete the work he started 2,000 years ago. "In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet" sound, an instantaneous transition will occur of all people. Those perishable earthly bodies will become imperishable spiritual bodies (verses 50-55)

Then those who chose Adam will experience the sting of sin—eternal death separated from God. Those who chose Jesus experience victory through Jesus Christ.

Choose Jesus! In the meantime, as we wait for our glorious reunion with him, stand first. Hold on to that promise. Give yourself to the work so others can choose Jesus too (verse 58).

Prayer Focus:

- Adam or Jesus? Who will you follow?
- For the moment when resurrection happens
- For those who need to know about the resurrection

Day 30

1 Corinthians 16

*Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love.
1 Corinthians 16:13-14*

Life is a mess.

Family is a mess.

Work is a mess.

Church is a mess.

Your house is a mess.

Your city is a mess.

Politics is a mess.

It's hard to find anything in this world today that isn't out of sync, out of touch and out of control.

Paul sat in Ephesus, over 14 hours away by modern transportation (car, foot and ferry), and wrote 1 Corinthians after hearing troubling news of their disarray. Unable to pack up and go himself, he did the next best thing—he wrote a letter. He had some success with the other letters he wrote before this, one to the Galatians and the other to the church in Thessalonica, so why not try again.

The letter reflects some key lessons we can learn today.

1. He was unafraid to tackle the tough stuff. Today we find ourselves apologizing for passages dealing with women, marriage and slavery but Paul had no problem.
2. He knew when to get tough and when to show grace. Some of the toughest rhetoric Paul used is found in 1 Corinthians. And yet, with his own testimony in mind, Paul understood

Grace in the Mess – 1 Corinthians

how we all make mistakes and through correction we find freedom.

3. Paul surrounded himself with great people. Chapter 16 includes some names we've come to know in other letters—Timothy, Apollos, Priscilla and Aquila—and some new names mentioned only here (Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus).
4. Surround yourself with grace. Grace is mentioned five times in 1 Corinthians, once at the very beginning, then again at the very end. Grace must bookend our life experiences.

In addition, Paul gave some bumper sticker inspiration for our messy lives in this final chapter.

Be on your guard. Watch out. Stay on your toes.

Stand firm in the faith. Trust. Don't waver.

Be courageous. Don't live in fear. Step out.

Be strong. There's no time for weakness.

Do everything in love. The other option is hate.

Greet one another. Be hospitable and accessible.

Show love to your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

Messy lives can be expected.

Grace is not.

Show others the unexpected.

Prayer Focus:

- For patience in the mess
- For support in the mess
- For grace in the mess

