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LIGUORI CATHOLIC BIBLE STUDY



Letters *to the* Corinthians

GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

WILLIAM A. ANDERSON, DMIN, PHD



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Introduction to *Liguori Catholic Bible Study*

READING THE BIBLE can be daunting. It's a complex book, and many a person of goodwill has tried to read the Bible and ended up putting it down in utter confusion. It helps to have a companion, and *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* is a solid one. Over the course of this series, you'll learn about biblical messages, themes, personalities, and events and understand how the books of the Bible rose out of the need to address new situations.

Across the centuries, people of faith have asked, "Where is God in this moment?" Millions of Catholics look to the Bible for encouragement in their journey of faith. Wisdom teaches us not to undertake Bible study alone, disconnected from the Church that was given Scripture to share and treasure. When used as a source of prayer and thoughtful reflection, the Bible comes alive.

Your choice of a Bible-study program should be dictated by what you want to get out of it. One goal of *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* is to give readers greater familiarity with the Bible's structure, themes, personalities, and message. But that's not enough. This program will also teach you to use Scripture in your prayer. God's message is as compelling and urgent today as ever, but we get only part of the message when it's memorized and stuck in our heads. It's meant for the entire person—physical, emotional, and spiritual.

We're baptized into life with Christ, and we're called to live more fully with Christ today as we practice the values of justice, peace, forgiveness, and community. God's new covenant was written on the hearts of the people of Israel; we, their spiritual descendants, are loved that intimately by God today. *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* will draw you closer to God, in whose image and likeness we are fashioned.

Group and Individual Study

The *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* series is intended for group and individual study and prayer. This series gives you the tools to start a study group. Gathering two or three people in a home or announcing the meeting of a Bible-study group in a parish or community can bring surprising results. Each lesson in this series contains a section to help groups study, reflect, pray, and share biblical reflections. Each lesson also has a second section for individual study.

Many people who want to learn more about the Bible don't know where to begin. This series gives them a place to start and helps them continue until they're familiar with all the books of the Bible.

Bible study can be a lifelong project, always enriching those who wish to be faithful to God's Word. When people complete a study of the whole Bible, they can begin again, making new discoveries with each new adventure into the Word of God.



Lectio Divina (Sacred Reading)

BIBLE STUDY isn't just a matter of gaining intellectual knowledge of the Bible; it's also about gaining a greater understanding of God's love and concern for creation. The purpose of reading and knowing the Bible is to enrich our relationship with God. God loves us and gave us the Bible to illustrate that love. As Pope Benedict XVI reminded us, a study of the Bible is not only an intellectual pursuit but also a spiritual adventure that should influence our dealings with God and neighbor.

The Meaning of *Lectio Divina*

Lectio divina is a Latin expression that means "divine or sacred reading." The process for *lectio divina* consists of Scripture readings, reflection, and prayer. Many clergy, religious, and laity use *lectio divina* in their daily spiritual reading to develop a closer and more loving relationship with God. Learning about Scripture has as its purpose the living of its message, which demands a period of reflection on the Scripture passages.

Prayer and *Lectio Divina*

Prayer is a necessary element for the practice of *lectio divina*. The entire process of reading and reflecting is a prayer. It's not merely an intellectual pursuit; it's also a spiritual one. Before the introduction of the book of the Bible under consideration, this present text includes a prayer for gathering one's thoughts before moving on to the passages in each section. This prayer may be used privately or in a group. For those who use the book for daily spiritual reading, the prayer for each section may be repeated each day. Some may wish to keep a journal of each day's meditation.

Pondering the Word of God

Lectio divina is the ancient Christian spiritual practice of reading the holy Scriptures with intentionality and devotion. This practice helps Christians center themselves and descend to the level of the heart to enter an inner quiet space, finding God.

This sacred reading is distinct from reading for knowledge or information, and it's more than the pious practice of spiritual reading. It is the practice of opening ourselves to the action and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As we intentionally focus on and become present to the inner meaning of the Scripture passage, the Holy Spirit enlightens our minds and hearts. We come to the text willing to be influenced by a deeper meaning that lies within the words and thoughts we ponder.

In this space, we open ourselves to be challenged and changed by the inner meaning we experience. We approach the text in a spirit of faith and obedience as a disciple ready to be taught by the Holy Spirit. As we savor the sacred text, we let go of our usual control of how we expect God to act in our lives and surrender our hearts and consciences to the flow of the divine (*divina*) through the reading (*lectio*).

The fundamental principle of *lectio divina* leads us to understand the profound mystery of the Incarnation, "The Word became flesh," not only in history but also within us.

Praying *Lectio* Today

Before you begin, relax your body and maintain a posture of prayer (back straight, eyes shut, feet flat on the floor). Then practice these four simple actions:

1. Read a passage from Scripture or the daily Mass readings. This is known as *lectio*. (If the Word of God is read aloud, the hearers listen attentively.)
2. Pray the selected passage with attention as you listen for a specific meaning that comes to mind. Once again, the reading is listened to or silently read and reflected or meditated on. This is known as *meditatio*.

3. The exercise becomes active. Pick a word, sentence, or idea that surfaces from your consideration of the chosen text. Does the reading remind you of a person, place, or experience? If so, pray about it. Compose your thoughts and reflection into a simple word or phrase. This prayer-thought will help you remove distractions during the *lectio*. This exercise is called *oratio*.
4. In silence, with your eyes closed, quiet yourself and become conscious of your breathing. Let your thoughts, feelings, and concerns fade as you consider the selected passage in the previous step (*oratio*). If you're distracted, use your prayer word to help you return to silence. This is *contemplatio*.

This exercise can take as long as you want, but in the context of this Bible study, 10 to 20 minutes should be sufficient.

Many teachers of prayer call contemplation the prayer of resting in God, a prelude to losing oneself in the presence of God. Scripture is transformed in our hearing as we pray and allow our hearts to unite intimately with the Lord. The Word truly takes on flesh, and this time it is manifested in our flesh.



How to Use This Bible-Study Companion

THE BIBLE, along with the commentaries and reflections found in this study, will help participants become familiar with the Scripture texts and lead them to reflect more deeply on the texts' message. At the end of this study, participants will have a firm grasp of the letters to the Corinthians and realize how those letters offer spiritual nourishment. This study is not only an intellectual adventure, it's also a spiritual one. The reflections lead participants into their own journey with the Scripture readings.

Context

When the author wrote his letters to the Corinthians, he was writing to a community with many gifts, but a community that needed guidance in the proper use of these gifts. To help readers learn about each passage in relation to those around it, each lesson begins with an overview that puts the Scripture passages into context.

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Part 1: Group Study

To give participants a comprehensive study of Letters to the Corinthians, the book is divided into seven lessons. Lesson 1 is group study only; Lessons 2 through 7 are divided into Part 1, group study, and Part 2, individual study. For example, Lesson 2 covers passages from 1 Corinthians 3—7. The study group reads and discusses only 1 Corinthians 3—4 (Part 1). Participants privately read and reflect on 1 Corinthians 5—7 (Part 2).

Group study may or may not include *lectio divina*. With *lectio divina*, the group meets for ninety minutes using the first format on page 16. Without *lectio divina*, the group meets for one hour using the second format on page 16, and participants are urged to privately read the *lectio divina* section at the end of Part 1. It contains additional reflections on the Scripture passages studied during the group session that will take participants even further into the passages.

Part 2: Individual Study

The passages not covered in Part 1 are divided into three to four shorter components, one to be studied each day. Participants who don't belong to a study group can use the lessons for private sacred reading. They may choose to reflect on one Scripture passage per day, making it possible for a clearer understanding of the Scripture passages used in their *lectio divina* (sacred reading).

A PROCESS FOR SACRED READING

Liguori Publications has designed this study to be user friendly and manageable. However, group dynamics and leaders vary. We're not trying to keep the Holy Spirit from working in your midst, thus we suggest you decide beforehand which format works best for your group. If you have limited time, you could study the Bible as a group and save prayer and reflection for personal time.

However, if your group wishes to digest and feast on sacred Scripture through both prayer and study, we recommend you spend closer to ninety minutes each week by gathering to study and pray with Scripture. *Lectio*

divina (see page 11) is an ancient contemplative prayer form that moves readers from the head to the heart in meeting the Lord. We strongly suggest using this prayer form whether in individual or group study.

GROUP-STUDY FORMATS

1. Bible Study With *Lectio Divina*

About ninety minutes of group study

- ✠ Gathering and opening prayer (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Scripture passage read aloud (5 minutes)
- ✠ Silently review the commentary and prepare to discuss it with the group (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Discuss the Scripture passage along with the commentary and reflection (30 minutes)
- ✠ Scripture passage read aloud a second time, followed by quiet time for meditation and contemplation (5 minutes)
- ✠ Spend some time in prayer with the selected passage. Group participants will slowly read the Scripture passage a third time in silence, listening for the voice of God as they read (10–20 minutes)
- ✠ Shared reflection (10–15 minutes)
- ✠ Closing prayer (3–5 minutes)

To become acquainted with lectio divina, see page 11.

2. Bible Study

About one hour of group study

- ✠ Gathering and opening prayer (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Scripture passage read aloud (5 minutes)
- ✠ Silently review the commentary and prepare to discuss it with the group (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Discuss the Scripture passage along with the commentary and reflection (40 minutes)
- ✠ Closing prayer (3–5 minutes)

Notes to the Leader

- ✘ Bring a copy of the *New American Bible*, revised edition.
- ✘ Plan which sections will be covered each week of your Bible study.
- ✘ Read the material in advance of each session.
- ✘ Establish written ground rules. (Example: We won't keep you longer than ninety minutes; don't dominate the sharing by arguing or debating.)
- ✘ Meet in an appropriate and welcoming gathering space (church building, meeting room, house).
- ✘ Provide name tags and perhaps use a brief icebreaker for the first meeting; ask participants to introduce themselves.
- ✘ Mark the Scripture passage(s) that will be read during the session.
- ✘ Decide how you would like the Scripture to be read aloud (whether by one or multiple readers).
- ✘ Use a clock or watch.
- ✘ Provide extra Bibles (or copies of the Scripture passages) for participants who don't bring their Bible.
- ✘ Ask participants to read "Introduction: Letters to the Corinthians" (page 19) before the first session.
- ✘ Tell participants which passages to study and urge them to read the passages and commentaries before the meeting.
- ✘ If you opt to use the *lectio divina* format, familiarize yourself with this prayer form ahead of time.

Notes to Participants

- ✘ Bring a copy of the *New American Bible*, revised edition.
- ✘ Read "Introduction: Letters to the Corinthians" (page 19) before the first session.
- ✘ Read the Scripture passages and commentaries before each session.
- ✘ Be prepared to share and listen respectfully. (This is not a time to debate beliefs or argue.)

Opening Prayer

Leader: O God, come to my assistance,

Response: O Lord, make haste to help me.

Leader: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit...

Response: ...as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Leader: Christ is the vine and we are the branches. As branches linked to Jesus, the vine, we are called to recognize that the Scriptures are always being fulfilled in our lives. It is the living Word of God living on in us. Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and kindle in us the fire of your divine wisdom, knowledge, and love.

Response: Open our minds and hearts as we study your great love for us as shown in the Bible.

Reader: (Open your Bible to the assigned Scripture(s) and read in a paced, deliberate manner. Pause for one minute, listening for a word, phrase, or image that you may use in your *lectio divina* practice.)

Closing Prayer

Leader: Let us pray as Jesus taught us.

Response: Our Father...

Leader: Lord, inspire us with your Spirit as we study your Word in the Bible. Be with us this day and every day as we strive to know you and serve you and to love as you love. We believe that through your goodness and love, the Spirit of the Lord is truly upon us. Allow the words of the Bible, your Word, to capture us and inspire us to live as you live and to love as you love.

Response: Amen.

Leader: May the divine assistance remain with us always.

Response: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



INTRODUCTION

Letters to the Corinthians

Read this overview before the first session.

Some years ago, a young girl wrote to a journalist expressing her sadness at discovering from her friends that Santa Claus did not really exist. The journalist wrote a classic reply to the young girl's letter in the newspaper, and it began with the famous words, "Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus." He told her of all the wonders and dreams of life, and he explained that these were all signs of the presence of Santa Claus in the world.

Letters have been written throughout history to assist people who have suddenly come upon some unforeseen difficulties in their life. Before they died, some parents have written letters to their children so that the children could read the letters later in life and remember what hopes the parents had for them. Some of history's great writers have had their letters collected and printed so that later generations might learn from their wisdom. For many people, writing a letter is a way for them to express deep, personal thoughts to another person, something they may be unable to do face-to-face.

Paul is writing to the church of God he founded in Corinth. His letters to the Corinthians read like letters from a concerned parent who wishes to share wisdom—and a warning—with his or her children. Paul has received some disturbing news about the people he knows well and loves. The letters reflect his own suffering as well as his desire for the Corinthians to remain faithful to his teachings. Paul notes that he can sound more forceful when writing than when speaking in person, but he warns that he will not hesitate to speak forcefully in person if he must do so. Paul demonstrates the value and power of letter writing. In reading Paul's letters to the Corinthians, we

gain an insight into his personality. He can be harsh if he must be, but he does not enjoy or delight in addressing the Corinthians in a harsh manner. Like a concerned parent, he worries about the manner in which they will receive his letters. He writes his letters not to berate them, but to correct them so that they may use their gifts well.

The letters to the Corinthians offer an interesting insight into one early church community as the members of the community attempt to live a life with this new message about Christ. The community has received an abundance of gifts and, surprisingly, these gifts have become a matter of division rather than unity. The gifts are new to the community, and Paul must address how to create orderly and correct use of these gifts. Even the celebration of the sacrament of baptism becomes a matter of division as members of one group claim superiority over others because of the apostle who baptized them.

Despite their many spiritual gifts, some in the community are still attempting to live a life in accord with Paul's teachings about Christ, while at the same time basing their judgments on earthly norms. In his letters to the Corinthians, Paul indicates that some are strong in the faith and realize that meat sacrificed to idols is not really offered to the gods because the gods do not exist. Others still coming into the faith must learn gradually that these false gods do not exist. Those with more mature faith must make sacrifices in order not to scandalize those who are just learning the faith.

The Author

The Acts of the Apostles narrates the story of Saul whose name became Paul in Greek and who was chosen by God to be an apostle to the Gentiles. Paul originally persecuted Christians but eventually converted to Christ and became a missionary to those whom he persecuted. Later, on a missionary journey with Barnabas, he was rejected along with Barnabas by the Jews in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia. Paul and Barnabas stated that it was necessary for them to preach first to the Jews, but since they were rejected, they turned to the Gentiles. They declared that the Lord chose them, saying, "I have made you a light to the Gentiles, that you may be an instrument of salvation to the ends of the earth" (13:47). This accounts for Paul's letters being written to Gentile audiences.

At the beginning of both letters to the Corinthians, Paul declares he is the author. By the end of the first century, Clement of Rome provided further evidence that Paul the Apostle is the author of these letters by making a reference to them. The Pauline authorship of these letters is also supported by the Moratorium fragments, which authenticate many early writings. The style, content, and manner of speaking in these letters also leave us with little doubt that Paul is their author.

The Acts of the Apostles (18:1–18) gives an account of Paul’s activity among the Corinthians. Paul came to Corinth around the year 50 during his second missionary journey, and he settled there for approximately eighteen months. By his own admission, Paul began his ministry to the Corinthians with deep fear (1 Corinthians 2:3). At Corinth, Paul stayed for a period of time with a Jewish couple and preached each week in the synagogue, attempting to explain that Jesus was the Messiah, but the Jews in the synagogue opposed him. As a result, Paul shook out his garments, a common gesture in Paul’s time used to show some form of rejection. He used the gesture to signal his rejection of his mission to the Jews and went to stay at the house of a Gentile.

The house in which Paul resided belonged to Titus Justus, the place where he began preaching to the Gentiles. We will read about Titus Justus in Paul’s letters to the Corinthians. Furthermore, Paul converted a synagogue leader named Crispus and his household, along with many Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians (1:14), Paul speaks of Crispus as one of the few he himself baptized. The Lord appeared to Paul and encouraged him not to fear, but to go on preaching.

After eighteen months at Corinth, Paul had converted many Gentiles to faith in Jesus Christ. Sometime after he left the city, Paul received word of difficulties within the Corinthian church, and he wrote these letters in response to these difficulties.

Audience

The Romans destroyed the ancient city of Corinth about 146 BC. A century later, Julius Caesar ordered the city rebuilt. Because it had ports on two seas, Corinth became a natural center for trade between the East and the West. The city became a melting pot of all the trends and

attitudes of the day, particularly the corruption involved in shipping and trading. Among those who lived in Corinth were Roman citizens, Jews, merchants from distant ports, and the native people of the area. In the ancient world, Corinth became identified with all the evils of the day, including temple prostitution. Pagan worship was rampant in the city. Paul preached about Christ in this corrupt city and converted many Gentiles to faith in Christ. The founding of a Christian community in such an atmosphere indicates the energy, courage, and faith of Paul. The faithfulness of the Corinthians to Paul shows that he instilled a strong faith in the hearts of the Corinthians who would now have to live their faith in this corrupt atmosphere.

Place and Date of Corinthians

Although Paul speaks in his First Letter to the Corinthians about his mission in Macedonia, the letter was most likely not written from that area. Macedonia encompassed a large territory located between the Greek peninsula and the Balkan highlands in southeastern Europe. Originally part of the Greek kingdom, it later became a Roman province and was part of the Roman Empire in Paul's era.

Paul spent some time at Ephesus, and most commentators believe he wrote his First Letter to the Corinthians from this city. Ephesus was an ancient Greek city, which, like Macedonia, later became part of the Roman Empire. It was a large city on the west coast of Asia Minor, near present-day Turkey. It is not easy to date the letter, because some time must be allowed for the community at Corinth to have developed to the point at which the letter would have been warranted. Because Paul mentions that Gallio was proconsul at the time of his visit to Corinth, we can date his missionary activity there somewhere after the year 50 (Acts 18:12–17). At the time, Gallio served as proconsul of the area for a single year. Some commentators date the letter as early as 53, but many others opt for the year 56 or 57.

Although commentators refer to the first letter as the “first” to the Corinthians, most commentators believe Paul wrote an earlier letter that has been lost. This one is the first of the letters of Paul to the Corinthians that history has been able to recover. Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians appears to be a collection of several letters of Paul put together by

an editor. Some commentators believe Paul himself gathered this small collection of letters into his Second Letter to the Corinthians.

Outline of 1 Corinthians

Condemnation of Disorders in the Corinthian Church (1—4)

Paul begins this letter with the usual greetings and thanksgivings before launching into the reason for the letter. He learned that factions exist among the Corinthians, and he challenges them to live the Christian message, looking toward the foolishness of the cross and their own lack of wisdom. True wisdom is not the wisdom of the world, but the wisdom given by the Spirit. The factions among the Corinthians show that they have not yet grasped the true meaning of the message. It is the message, not the messenger, that is the source of true wisdom.

Moral Disorders (5—11:1)

Paul lists the disorders found in the Corinthian community and instructs its members in correct behavior. A man having sexual relations with his stepmother should be cast out of the community for the sake of his own change of heart as well as for the sake of the community. Freedom in Christ does not lead to sexual license, because the body of the baptized is a temple of the Holy Spirit. Marriage and celibacy are important, and the believer should continue to live with the unbeliever as long as it does not lead to any problems for the believer. One should be willing to refrain from the eating of meat sacrificed to idols for the sake of the weak. To share at the table of idols, however, is to share in a conflict with the eucharistic celebration, which is the table of the Lord. The guiding principle is to do all for the glory of God, as Paul himself does in imitation of Christ.

Conduct at Worship and Spiritual Gifts (11:2—14:40)

Paul discusses the role of women in worship and states that all should gather at the Lord's Supper with loving concern. The gifts that come from the Spirit are given for the common good, the body of Christ. Rather than look for passing gifts, the Christian should seek the lasting gift of love. This gift will lead a person to seek the gifts that benefit and build up the community. Within the assembly, the use of these gifts should be reasonable and orderly.

The Resurrection (15:1–58)

For the members of the Corinthian community who do not believe in resurrection from the dead, Paul points out that Christ was raised first and that all others will share in a similar resurrection. Although they might deny resurrection by their words, their practice states otherwise; they accept the example of Paul and baptism for the sake of the dead. The body that is raised is a glorified body, unlike our natural body.

The Collection (16:1–24)

Paul concludes by instructing the people to set aside monetary gifts for the Christians of Jerusalem. He expresses his plans and sends greetings to the people of Corinth from himself and others with him.

Outline of 2 Corinthians
Opening Address (1:1–11)

Paul introduces himself as the sender of the letter and as an apostle. He offers thanksgiving for the reception the Corinthians have given to his letters and for their ability to endure what they must for the faith.

Crisis (1:12—7:16)

Paul explains that he intended to visit the Corinthians, but he was detained. He urges the community to forgive an offender and expresses his concern for his companion Titus who eventually joined him. He speaks of being a minister of the New Covenant and contrasts it with the Old Covenant. Recognizing the difficulties endured by the Corinthians, he stresses his afflictions and compares them to earthen vessels. He sees the new community through the eyes of Christ and states that he came in sincerity, not wishing to cause anyone to stumble. And he calls upon the Corinthians to live up to the holiness to which they are called. Finally, he rejoices when he receives news that the Corinthians have reconciled themselves to his message.

The Collection for Jerusalem (8:1—9:15)

Paul continues to urge the Corinthians to take up a collection for the Church in Jerusalem, and he commends them for their generosity. He sends Titus to care for the collection.

Paul's Defense of His Ministry (10:1—13:10)

Paul boasts of his sufferings, his labors, his visions, and his weakness. He does this not to boast of himself, but to build up the faith of the Corinthians.

Conclusion (13:11–13)

He ends with words of encouragement and blesses them, naming the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Trinitarian blessing).

NOTE: When the letters are designated as 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians, the reader must realize that Paul is writing to the Corinthians who accepted faith in Jesus as the Christ, not a letter to everyone in the city of Corinth. Throughout this study, the term Corinthians is used to designate only those who were converted to Christ.



LESSON 2

Temples of the Holy Spirit

1 CORINTHIANS 3—7

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own. For you have been purchased at a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body (6:19–20).

Opening Prayer (SEE PAGE 18)

Context

Part 1: 1 Corinthians 3—4 Paul views the Corinthians as spiritual children who had to be fed spiritual milk because they were still greatly influenced by the world. The proof is in their attitude, which led to their bragging about belonging to Paul or Apollos or Cephas. Ministers for Christ work together, with one planting and another harvesting, or one laying the foundation and another building. All must fulfill their task well. They must act as trustworthy stewards. Paul offers his life and that of Apollos as a pattern. Paul warns them that they should beware of boasting and declares that he is weak, while sarcastically stating that they are strong. Likewise, he warns them that he will come and face those inflated with pride. They can choose whether he should come to berate them or treat them gently and with love.

Part 2: 1 Corinthians 5—7 In these passages, Paul addresses moral disorders within Corinth. He bemoans those who are practicing incest and urges the people not to mingle with those who are sinful. Paul

laments over those within the Christian community who are suing one another in pagan courts and warns against sexual immorality, reminding the Corinthians that their bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. He talks about the relationship between a husband and wife and urges celibacy for the unmarried and widowed. The circumcised are to remain circumcised and the slaves are to remain slaves, but slaves should see themselves as free in the Lord. He speaks of practical problems of living as a virgin or a married person and the spiritual advantages and difficulties of each.

PART 1: GROUP STUDY (1 CORINTHIANS 3—4)

Read aloud 1 Corinthians 3—4.

3:1–15 The role of God’s ministers

In the previous passage, Paul made a distinction between those who were spiritually mature and those who lived with the wisdom of the world. He now tells his listeners that they were not spiritually mature but more like “fleshly people,” that is, worldly people. In their desire to learn about Jesus, they had learned as though they were spiritual infants in Christ. Paul tells them he gave them milk, that is, he presented his message in such a way that they could begin to grasp it. Since, like infants, they could not accept solid food, he kept his message simple. Even now, Paul tells them, they are still spiritual infants, not ready for solid food. The proof of their adherence to their natural selves can be seen in the divisions in the community, signs that they are people who judge according to worldly standards. The mere fact that they label themselves as followers of Paul or followers of Apollos is proof that they are living according to human norms.

Paul uses the image of farming to teach that each minister of the gospel has a particular function and that all work together for the sake of the harvest. He declares that his role and that of Apollos are ministries given to them by God. As the founder of the church at Corinth, Paul was the one who planted the seed, and Apollos, who followed after Paul, was the one who watered the ground. God, however, is the one who performs the

greater task—giving the church its growth. The planter and the waterer work for the sake of the same harvest, and they will receive their wages in accordance with their labors. Paul continues to exhort his readers that he and Apollos are coworkers with God, while the Corinthians are the field and the building. After using the image of farming for the Corinthians, the sudden use of the image of the Corinthians as a “building” may surprise the reader, since it has nothing to do with planting and growing. But the image is used to link this passage with the one that follows.

Paul continues to see himself as the founder of the community, the one who laid the foundation of the building of the church at Corinth. Another builds upon the foundation. The builder, however, must build correctly or the building will crumble. The foundation is Christ, and the builder has the duty to use sturdy materials for the building. The durability of the structure, or the lack of durability, will eventually identify the type of ministry performed by the builder. Paul is saying that the firm faith of the Corinthians depends not only on him, but on others who come after him to teach the Corinthians. All ministries work together for a successful outcome.

Paul turns his attention to the Day of Judgment, which he simply calls “the Day.” On the Day of Judgment, the role of the worker will be tested. If the structure continues to withstand the fire of this day, the worker will receive a reward. For Paul, the reward seems to refer to the number of those who stand firm in the faith. If the structure does not withstand this final judgment, the ministers may be saved despite their poor ministry, but they will not receive the reward of seeing those to whom they ministered being firm in their faith. In writing these words, Paul may be giving a warning to a certain minister within the Corinthian community whom he does not name but whom he believes is not building the faith of the people in a proper manner.

3:16–23 Temples of God

Paul now uses the image of a spiritual temple for the first time in this letter. The concept of a temple is sacred to both Jews and Greeks alike, and Paul calls the church of Corinth a temple of God. The temple was the dwelling place of God. The temple in which the Spirit dwells among the Corinthians

is not a temple built of stone, but a temple composed of members of the Corinthian church. Paul warns those who would destroy this temple that in so doing, they will be destroyed by God. He is speaking to those who preach a message contrary to the message of the gospel. To lead members of the Corinthian church away from the gospel message is to destroy the temple of the Spirit. Because of this presence of the Spirit, the temple can be called a “holy” temple.

Paul had to contend with a group who apparently considered themselves intellectuals with true wisdom. Paul warns them that they are deceiving themselves, and so invites them to become fools for the sake of true wisdom. Those who think of themselves as wise in the ways of the world are actually the ones God sees as foolish. Paul quotes from Job (5:13), who speaks of the wise as catching themselves in their own clever traps, and he quotes from Psalms (94:11), showing that God is always aware of the emptiness of worldly wisdom.

Paul urges these supposed “intellectuals” to cease their boasting, since they have received everything from Christ. They do not belong to anyone or anything; instead they belong to Christ, who is God.

4:1–21 Following the example of Paul

Paul tells his readers that he and other preachers of the gospel should be regarded as servants and stewards of God’s gifts and nothing more. They administer the mysteries of God, a reference to the spiritual message and gifts that come from Jesus. A major virtue for stewards is to be trustworthy servants, because the master depends on them to distribute the gifts in the master’s name.

Paul believes he has served well as an administrator of God’s gifts, and he does not look to the Corinthians for their judgment. Although he finds nothing to blame in himself, Paul realizes it is not his role to pass judgment on himself. The master, whom he or she represents, must do the judging. In this case, it is the Lord who will judge Paul. Because he expects this judgment at the time when the Lord returns, Paul warns the Corinthians not to waste their time judging him. At the time of the Second Coming, nothing will be hidden from God, and all will be revealed.

Paul uses himself and Apollos as examples, since the Christians of

Corinth have boasted of belonging to one or the other. Just as Paul or Apollos have avoided acting as though one were better than the other, so the Corinthians should not feel that some are better than others because they can boast of belonging to Paul or Apollos. He reminds his readers that neither he nor Apollos taught them to judge in this manner.

As he continues his exhortation, Paul appeals to the Corinthians to name those gifts they have merited on their own and have not received. Paul constantly teaches that no one merits the gifts that come to us from Christ. Because this is so, no one has a right to boast about those things that are strictly gifts given through Christ. Paul mocks the attitude of his readers that leads them to boast about their gifts as though they have reached the point of satisfaction, a wealth of knowledge, and a kingly state without help from Paul or Apollos. They are acting as though they reign with God without any help from those who preached the gospel. Paul sarcastically wishes that they were truly sharing in this reign so that he and Apollos could learn from them how to become kings like them.

During Paul's time, a conqueror would march in triumph at the head of the parade with his army immediately behind him. At the rear would march the prisoners and slaves from the lands he'd conquered, many of whom would be thrown to the wild animals in the arena. Paul sarcastically tells the Corinthians that they are like the conquerors at the head of the parade, while he and the other disciples are like the prisoners at the end of the parade who march to the slaughter. Like the people destined for the arena, Paul and Apollos accept the position of being the fools for Christ, weak and unworthy of respect, while the Corinthians appear to be wise in Christ and honored. Despite their foolishness for Christ, they are the truly wise ones who are willing to go hungry, thirsty, poorly clothed, mistreated, and homeless. They bless when insulted and speak kindly when slandered. According to worldly standards, they are the outcasts, the rubbish, and fools.

Paul changes his tone to that of a father who has brought the Corinthians to the faith in the first place. They have many guides, but only one father, namely, Paul. He writes to urge them to change their ways and to imitate him who first brought the gospel to them. Paul's concern and love for them are so great that he is willing to send Timothy to them, despite his

great desire of having Timothy as a companion on his missionary journey. Timothy was apparently well known to the people of Corinth.

Finally, Paul challenges those who have made themselves important in his absence, and he promises to come to Corinth (if God is willing) to deal with these people. He will not judge them according to their words but according to their deeds, which Paul sees as a true sign of the reign of God among them. The Corinthians, like children, will determine whether Paul will come with a rod or with gentleness.

Review Questions

1. How can we apply Paul's message about planting and harvesting? In what way might God generate growth in our daily lives?
2. How does the knowledge that we are a temple of God, the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, affect our manner of life?
3. Paul's teaches us through the Corinthians that we are servants and stewards of God's mysteries. How might we apply this understanding to our daily lives?
4. What is a fool for Christ according to Paul? Explain. Share how you might be challenged to be foolish for the sake of the reign of God.
5. What does Paul mean when he says he wants his readers to imitate him?

Closing Prayer (SEE PAGE 18)

Pray the closing prayer now or after *lectio divina*.

Lectio Divina (SEE PAGE 11)

Relax your body and maintain a posture of prayer (back straight, eyes shut, feet flat on the floor). This exercise can take as long as you want, but in the context of this Bible study, 10 to 20 minutes should be sufficient.

The meditations that follow are provided only to help group participants use this prayer form, but note that *lectio* is intended to bring one to a place of prayerful contemplation where the Word of God speaks to the hearer from his or her heart. (See page 11 for further instruction.)

The role of God's ministers (3:1–15)

Jesus spoke of the reign of God as likened to a seed that is sown and grows little by little, producing first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain of the ear (Mark 4:26–29). Paul realizes that our role in life is to plant seeds, nourish the seeds as needed, and finally bring in a harvest; but Paul also notes that the harvester is not always the planter.

A man once wrote about becoming a Christian because of his admiration of a fellow Christian prisoner while they were both in a concentration camp. The Christian prisoner, ignoring his own hunger, offered his food to others because they were hungry and in need of nourishment. Years later the man, who was fed and survived his ordeal, approached his pastor and asked to become Catholic.

Throughout our lives we are called to plant seeds, not transplant trees. In other words, our small actions are important in God's creation. No one can really boast that he or she is better than others, since God is the one who makes our mission fruitful. One plants, one harvests, and God gives the growth. The Christian man in the concentration camp planted the seed; the grace of God gave the seed growth, and the pastor reaped the harvest. That is the way God's creation works.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Temples of God (3:16–23)

The message of Paul elaborates on this simple acceptance of God's reign in our lives. We are temples of God, which means that the Spirit of God dwells in us. A Jesuit named Isaac Jogues was one of the first missionaries to come to the American continent. Seeking to bring the message of Christ to the natives of the area, he was captured and tortured horribly. A little more than a year later, he managed to escape and return to France. After recuperating and working in France, he asked to return to America, where he renewed his missionary ministry, despite its dangers. He was again captured, tortured, and finally killed.

To many people without faith, Saint Isaac Jogues was a fool. He suffered and died because he believed in something he could not see with his eyes. Isaac Jogues, however, believed he was an instrument of the Holy Spirit,

a temple of God's presence, and his life meant less to him than the need to share Christ's message with others. The Apostle Paul would understand the motive of love of God driving Isaac Jogues. He warns that "the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God."

Paul invites us to become foolish enough to realize that reality is often what we do not see and cannot measure. As Christians, we believe that we are temples of the Holy Spirit, with the Spirit of God dwelling in us and guiding us. This can sound like foolishness to the unbeliever, but it is reality to those who accept this truth with the faith of a small child.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Following the example of Paul (4:1–21)

Paul offers himself and Apollos as models for the people of Corinth. Just as they are willing to be fools for Christ, so the Corinthians should be willing to be fools for Christ by serving others.

A man named Tom took care of his wife when she became ill and was near death. After she died, he visited the elderly people in the neighborhood and offered to do their grocery shopping for them. Since he could not drive because of his age, he would purchase the groceries for a homebound person, put the groceries in his red wagon, and pull the wagon to the person's home. When he died, a number of people wanted to say something about him at his wake. Each one seemed to have the same theme: "Tom was a saint, a true servant of the people."

In John's Gospel, Jesus takes the role of a servant and washes the feet of his disciples, saying, "If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do" (13:14–15). He invites us to follow his example, knowing that what really matters in life is serving Christ and others in the name of Christ. According to Paul, all gifts are given for the common good, not for the boasting of the one who receives the gift.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

PART 2: INDIVIDUAL STUDY (1 CORINTHIANS 5—7)

Day 1: A Case of Incest (5:1–13)

Paul scolds the community for their acceptance of immorality in their midst. Besides the news of factions in Corinth, Paul declares that he also received news, perhaps from the household of Chloe, that the Corinthians are allowing a member of the community, who is committing incest by living with his stepmother, to live among them. He declares that even pagans condemn this sin. Jewish and Roman law both condemned marriage between a man and his stepmother. Paul views the acceptance of such a situation on the part of the Corinthians as a sign that they have abandoned the message he preached to them.

He continues by noting that the church community has the authority to excommunicate such a person, but the Corinthians have not done so. Rather than accepting this sin, the Corinthians should express great sorrow over it and expel the sinner from their community. Although he is not present in Corinth, Paul excommunicates that person in his letter, basing his right on the authority of Christ. As long as a person belongs to the Church, the Church must protect the person from destruction by Satan. Paul urges the community to turn this man over to Satan, not for the sake of condemning him, but for the sake of saving him. Perhaps in receiving this excommunication, he will experience a need to avoid sin and be able to save his spirit on Judgment Day.

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

When the scribes and the Pharisees accused Jesus of eating and drinking with sinners, Jesus responded, “I did not come to call the righteous but sinners” (Mark 2:17). Paul is astonished that someone would commit a sin of incest, which even pagans knew was not right, but Paul still sought that person’s good. He wanted the person cut off from the community so that he would not contaminate them, but he also wanted a punishment that would lead to his salvation.

A woman who was very exacting with her religious practices lost her mother, father, and sixteen-year-old brother in a tragic car accident. She became bitter, blaming God for what happened. When she was participating in the eucharistic liturgy on the following Sunday, she suddenly felt she did not belong. The woman eventually turned completely against God, became wildly promiscuous, and drank alcohol until she could hardly stand. A year later, she awoke one Sunday morning beside a man she did not know and suddenly realized how aimless and unfulfilled her life had become. The night before, she had drunk heavily and could not remember how she came to sleep with this stranger. After showering and getting rid of the man, she ran to the noon liturgy being celebrated nearby and wept throughout the liturgy. She met with the pastor after worship, confessed her sins, and received absolution. She came back to God, humbled, repentant, and grateful for God's love in her life. She was a sinner who had returned.

Jesus' concern for sinners can prompt us to realize that instead of rejecting the sinner, we should pray for him or her and work for the person's salvation. In the Gospel of Luke, we read that the people of a Samaritan town did not welcome Jesus and his disciples because they were on a journey to Jerusalem. James and John ask Jesus if he wants them to call down fire from heaven to consume them. But Jesus rebukes them for such a thought (9:51–56). Jesus did not come to destroy sinners, but to call them to repentance. We never know the journey toward faith taken by those who are sinful.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Day 2: Our Bodies as Temples of the Holy Spirit (6:1–20)

Paul reproaches the Corinthian Christians for the practice of bringing one another before the pagan courts of Corinth rather than before the leaders within their own community. When Paul refers to these pagan courts as wicked and unjust, he is speaking of their lack of faith in the message of Jesus rather than any lack of honesty within the courts. Although dishonesty may have existed, it is not Paul's intention to con-

demn these courts. His rebuke is for the Christians in the community who make use of them.

Jewish tradition taught that those who follow the ways of God will judge the world. Paul applies this idea to the Christians who are now living in an age that he believes is the last age. He reminds them that they will be called upon to judge the whole world, and if this is so, they should be able to judge correctly the small matters of daily life. The judgment made by Jesus' followers will be so universal that Paul even includes in it the judgment of angels. The sin of the Corinthians is a sin of pride, yet their actions show that they have no confidence in themselves. Paul hopes to shame the Corinthians because of their attitude of choosing pagan judges to judge them. They do not have confidence enough to choose anyone in the community as a judge.

Paul goes a step further, telling the Corinthians that they should not have any reason for dragging one another into court in the first place. The mere fact that they follow the pagan practices of bringing lawsuits against one another shows they have already given way to the flesh. In Matthew's Gospel, we read that Jesus tells his followers to accept all injustice for the sake of the kingdom of God. Paul asks why they do not put up with injustice or with being cheated instead of inflicting cheating and injustice on one another. Those who are unjust will not inherit the kingdom of God. Paul knew from listening to the preaching about Jesus that Jesus warned the scribes and Pharisees that they would not enter the kingdom of God since they closed entry into God's kingdom to others (Matthew 23:13). Paul lists those who will not inherit the kingdom of God, including those guilty of sexual sins, idolatry, thievery, greed, drunkenness, or slander. He reminds his readers that at one time they were guilty of these sins, but now they have been washed, that is, baptized and justified in the name of Jesus Christ and the Spirit of God.

In speaking about the need to follow the practices of the Mosaic Law, Paul tells his listeners that they were no longer slaves to the law, but free from the law. Some of the Corinthians misinterpreted this freedom to mean freedom to commit whatever actions they wished, including those considered sinful. Some even went so far as to separate the body and human activities from the spirit of a person. They lived as if the body belonged

to nature and would have no effect on the final outcome, so one could do whatever he or she wished with the body.

For Paul, however, the body refers to the whole person, and he reminds his readers that, through baptism, the body belongs to Christ. Just as God raised Jesus from the dead, so God will raise all people. Paul uses the Old Testament image of marriage that speaks of the two becoming one flesh (Genesis 2:24). The body joined to Christ is one with Christ, but the body joined to a prostitute becomes one with the prostitute. Just as a married person belongs to the spouse, so the Christian belongs to Christ. Paul tells his readers that they have been “purchased at a price,” a reference to the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus enters a synagogue on the Sabbath and reads words from the prophet Isaiah that apply to him and to all who are baptized into Christ. He reads, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...” (4:18). Paul’s words reinforce those of Jesus when he tells us that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. He believes this so firmly that he cannot accept that Christians would use their body for sin. Since we are temples of the Holy Spirit, every sin we commit is a sin against the body, which has been made sacred in Christ.

Several years ago a movie posed the question, *Whose body is it, anyway?* The answer for many is that it is MY body. Paul, however, would not agree with such an answer. According to Paul, our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, and to sin against our body is to sin against this sacred temple of the Holy Spirit. Paul’s attitude about the body is certainly countercultural. He tells us that as temples of the Holy Spirit, we are not our own; our bodies belong to God. When someone says, “This is my body, and I have a right to do what I want with it,” he or she is acting contrary to the Scriptures. These are deep and challenging words for us to ponder.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Day 3: Advice to the Married (7:1–24)

Paul speaks to the Corinthians concerning specific questions that have arisen within the community. We should not interpret Paul's words in this passage as a treatise on marriage. Some of the Corinthians believed they were no longer bound to their spouses after their baptism, while others believed marriage did not matter since it was the spirit and not the body that was important. They apparently saw marriage as something for the body. In answering the Corinthians, however, Paul speaks from the context of the Second Coming of Christ, which he expected to occur.

Because of the Second Coming of Christ, Paul teaches that one would be better off without any sexual relations, but if a person has a strong sexual need, then he or she should marry rather than commit sin. Through marriage, each one gives the other the right to their body, and neither the man nor the woman should reject this right unless they do so by mutual consent. Throughout this passage Paul treats women with much more concern than he would have learned from his Jewish background. During Paul's time, there was a Jewish practice of abstaining from sexual relations at a time of prayer (Exodus 19:15). Paul does not even allow this if one of the parties disagrees. Even when they do abstain for the sake of prayer, Paul urges them to continue their sexual relations after a time to avoid falling into sin. Paul seemed to imply that people entered into marriage because of their need for a sexual relationship; he makes no mention of the love that brings a man and a woman together.

Paul was apparently not married, and he wishes that all people had this gift. We must continue to keep in mind that Paul was speaking in the context of the imminent Second Coming of Christ. He wishes that all Christians could dedicate themselves to this preparation for the coming of Christ. Paul considers this a gift but admits that others have different gifts than he has. As he addresses the widows and those who are unmarried, he shares the same message with them. It would be better if they could remain unmarried, as he is, but he admits that it is better to marry than to live with a burning desire for sexual union.

Within Judaism during Paul's time, a woman was forbidden to divorce her husband, although she could apparently separate herself from him

while continuing to live in the same house. Paul warns the woman who separates from her husband that she should live as a single person or seek reconciliation with her husband. The husband, as Christ himself had said, cannot divorce his wife. In preaching among those who were not Jewish, Paul found himself in the midst of unforeseen issues that were not treated in the Scriptures or in the words of Jesus. Within the Corinthian community, both wives and slaves owed allegiance to the man of the house, even to the point of choosing the same religion. Paul had to decide how to judge situations where one of the spouses accepted Christianity while the other remained a pagan.

Paul tells his readers that his decision comes from himself and not from the Lord. He directs the believer to remain with the unbeliever if the unbeliever does not object to the believer's practice of the faith. According to the common Jewish attitude at the time, the unbeliever would contaminate the believer, and therefore they should not remain together. Paul, however, takes an opposite view. He tells the believer to stay, and in this way the believer saves the unbeliever. This view was shared by many Christians at the time of Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Children born of Christian parents were considered holy, even if only one parent was Christian. It was also believed that if the unbeliever contaminated the believer, then he or she would also contaminate the child and make the child unholy. Paul, of course, rejects this attitude.

Paul views the call to marriage as a call to live in the peace of the Lord. If the unbeliever refuses to allow the believer to live in this peace, then the spouses may separate and are no longer bound to each other. Paul ends this passage on a more positive note, reminding the believing husband or wife that he or she could lead a spouse to conversion and salvation.

Furthermore, Paul calls those who believe that their baptism brought about external changes in their lives to continue living in the state in which they were baptized. He continues to write in the context that the Second Coming of Christ will take place soon. Paul tells his readers that this rule applies not only to them but to all the churches. Apparently some of those who were circumcised strove to have this condition reversed, while some who were not circumcised apparently believed that circumcision would make them more dedicated to their call. Paul tells both to leave things as

they were at the time of their baptism. Circumcision or the lack of it has no value in Christianity. What really matters is how a person acts.

Paul gives the same message to slaves. He is not stating that slavery is good for society, but he is saying that baptism does not change that situation. Paul uses the idea of slavery and freedom to make a point. A slave is free in Christ, and a person who is free becomes a slave in Christ. The free person no longer belongs to himself or herself, but to Christ. Even if they gain freedom, slaves should still remember that they are slaves in Christ. During the time of Paul, slaves could buy freedom if they could earn enough money to do so. Paul refers to this idea when he speaks of the price paid for freedom in Christ. All have been “bought with a price”—namely, the death and resurrection of Jesus. Paul makes no mention of the one to whom this price is paid. He warns his readers not to return to the slavery of the wicked and repeats his admonition that all should continue in the state in which they were before their baptism.

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

Some people believe that Paul was against marriage, but in reality, Paul wants those who are married and those who are single to remain faithful to their choice in life.

A certain medical missionary once had his plans set on marriage and settling down with his family in an affluent neighborhood. While traveling in a foreign country one day, he discovered people suffering unnecessarily from diseases eradicated in prospering countries centuries earlier. The suffering of the people touched him so deeply that he decided to abandon his plans for a more prosperous and softer life for a life in the jungles helping these people. He also decided he could not ask a wife to travel with him into such a life, so he took the vow of celibacy and dedicated himself to Christ and his ministry.

Another man who experienced a great desire to have a family met a woman who had the ideals and goals equal to his. They married, raised four children, and remained faithful in their dedication to the Lord. Throughout their marriage, they experienced many joys and

difficulties, and in their prayers, they often had to call on the help of God to get them through some very difficult moments.

The reality of life is that the unmarried man in the jungle and the married couple had their difficult and joyful moments. When Paul speaks about marriage, he recognizes the challenge of not marrying and the commitment needed in marriage. He realizes that all people have a different calling and a different reason for choosing their direction in life. When Paul writes about marriage, he attempts to view it in the context of God's creation. Whether a person marries or not, the person must still remain faithful to one's choice in life.

✧ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Day 4: Paul's Views on Marriage (7:25–40)

In reading Paul's views on marriage, the reader should realize that he wrote in a different age to a particular people. He lived with the belief that the Second Coming of Christ would happen soon, and he experiences an urgency in helping the Corinthians to be prepared. His words should not be taken as his total teaching about marriage but only within the context of his belief that the Second Coming was about to happen. He begins by claiming that he has received no word from the Lord regarding virgins. What he writes here is his opinion about marriage and celibacy, which he admits comes from his own thoughts.

Paul tells those who are already married that they should remain in that state and not seek a separation. He believes it is better for those who are not married to remain in this state. For those who believe it would be sinful to marry after baptism, he instructs them that this is not so. He realistically recognizes that marriage has many trials, and Paul would like to help his readers avoid some of them. Since people are living in the last days and the time is near, they should keep their minds and hearts on the Lord and not be distracted by the needs of marriage or the world. In view of the Second Coming happening soon, he states that those who have a wife should act as though they do not have a wife. Those who are weeping, that is, living in difficulty, should live as though they are not facing these difficulties. Those who are rejoicing should live as though

they are not rejoicing, and those who are using the world should act as though they are not using it. Paul's beliefs are driven by the thought that the world will soon end.

Paul's aim is to free people from the anxieties of the world. The unmarried man, free of family concerns, has more time to give to the Lord than the married, who must be concerned about the needs of his wife. The reason Paul continues to speak about this preference is that he truly believes he is urging his readers to a better form of preparation. He does not wish to burden his readers with stiff restrictions, but he wishes to offer them a means of devoting themselves more fully to the Lord. A woman who marries faces the same difficulties as the married man. A virgin, on the other hand, is anxious about the things of the Lord.

Writing in a male-dominated society, Paul speaks of a man's obligation toward his virgin. When Paul speaks of a man's virgin here, he appears to be speaking of a woman the man may or may not choose to marry, depending on the strength of the man's "passions." The man who marries is doing well, and the one who does not marry will do better. Paul recognizes the physical passion a man may feel, and he praises those of strong will who are able not to marry despite this passion. When Paul speaks of widows, he accepts the teaching that marriage binds a couple together as long as one's spouse is alive. In the case of a spouse's death, the living person may marry again, although Paul continues to advocate celibacy. Paul states that the widow who does marry should marry in the Lord. This could mean a marriage according to Christian customs or a marriage between Christian partners. Paul reiterates his belief that a widow would be better off if she remains as she is, that is, celibate.

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

Paul wrote his letter in the context of the Second Coming of Christ, which he believed would happen soon. He realizes that marriage comes as a gift from God for the sake of creation, and the choice of not marrying can also come from God for the sake of one's desire to dedicate his or her life totally to Christ's mission on earth.

Many of the saints who chose religious life tell stories of the conflict they endured with their parents, who believed they were making a foolish choice. Their parents wanted grandchildren and could not imagine anyone going through life without a spouse. The reality is that God calls us all to different vocations in life, and God gives a person the strength and grace to live that vocation. The call people receive is for them alone, and they are foolish to judge that their manner of life is the only call. The call to marriage comes from God, and the call to a celibate life dedicated to Christ comes from God. Throughout history, the married and the celibate life can claim a number of holy and good people in their ranks.

Although Paul in this passage leans in the direction of celibacy for dedication to the Lord and allows that some people must marry for the sake of avoiding sin, the total message of the Scriptures points to the value of marriage and celibacy for the sake of fulfilling one's particular call. Both gifts come from God and are values in God's creation. The real challenge is not just a decision concerning one's direction in life, but the challenge of living faithfully in whatever vocation a person chooses to follow.

✧ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Review Questions

1. How would cutting a person off from the community lead to that person's salvation?
2. What are your thoughts about Paul's command not to associate with people who are immoral?
3. How does Paul's ideas about bringing someone to be judged by unbelievers compare with our practice concerning lawsuits today?
4. What is Paul's basic message about one's state in life?
5. What do you think of Paul's advice concerning celibacy? Marriage? How might Paul's message on marriage and celibacy also be applied to those living the single life?