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Paul the Apostle

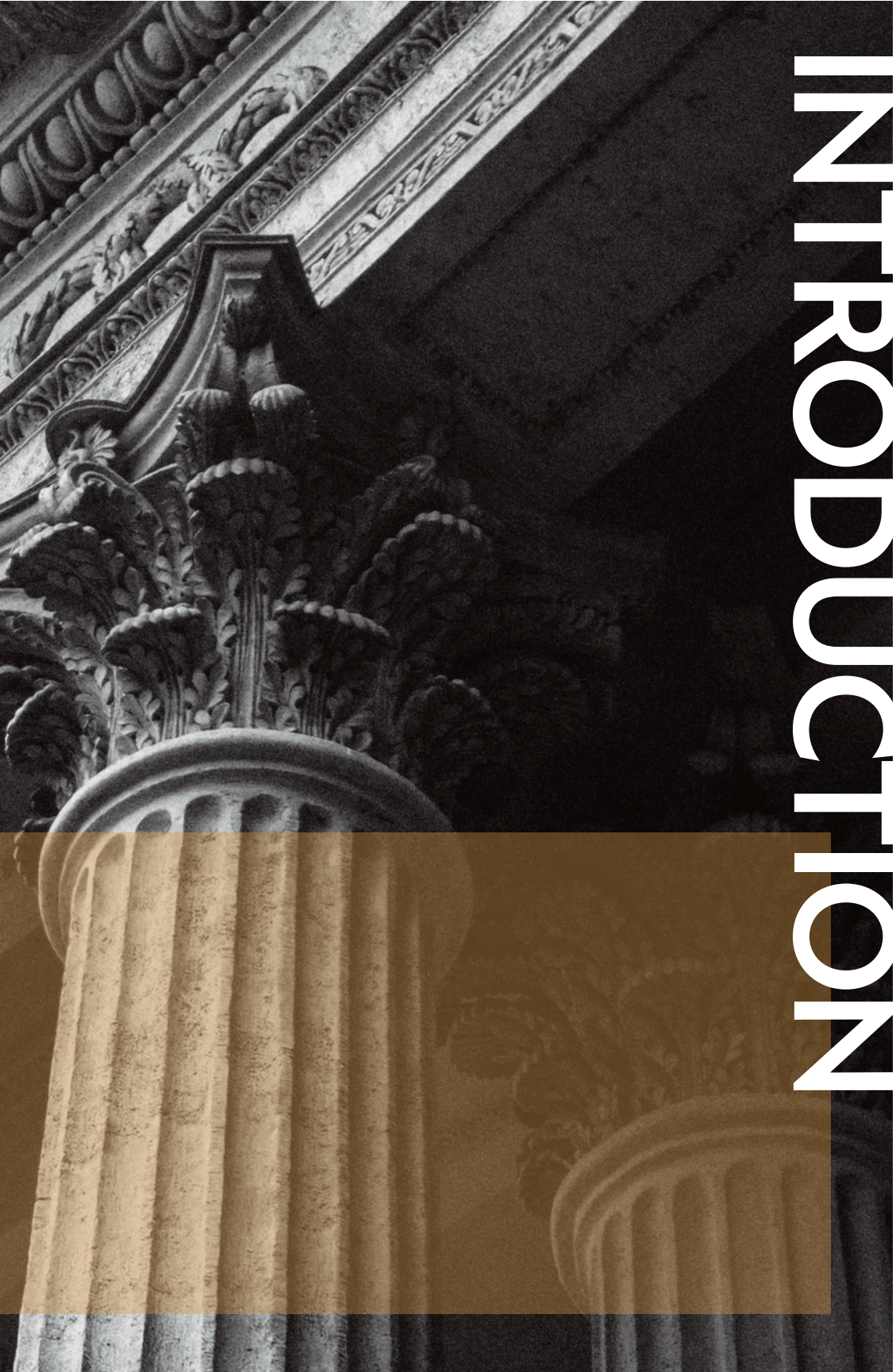
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# INTRODUCTION

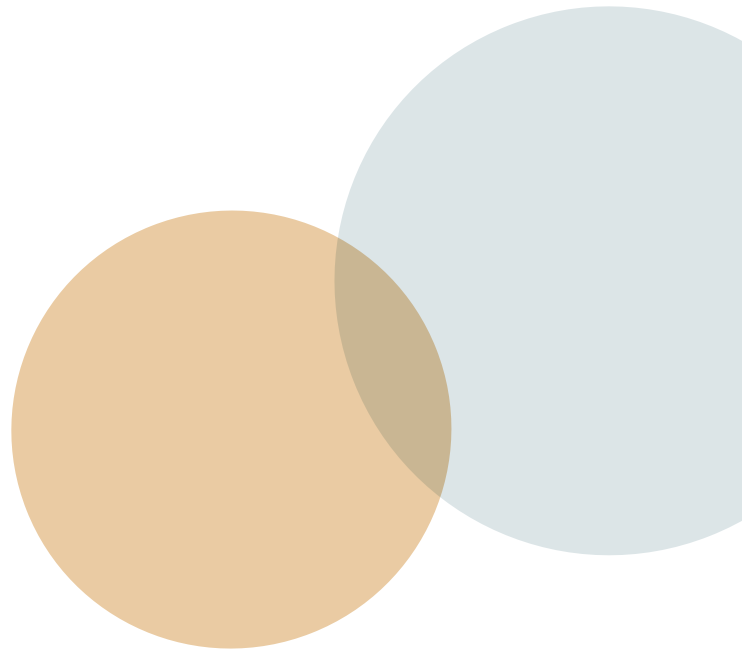
# Paul the Apostle

Our study of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians requires that we initially get to know the author and his audience. The Apostle Paul was a first-century Jew who grew up between two worlds. Even his name points to this reality. He goes by both Saul and Paul. Experienced readers of the Bible will have encountered people with two names before: Abram/Abraham, Sarai/Sarah, Jacob/Israel, Simon/Peter. However, Saul/Paul is a different story. Those other examples all involved a dramatic moment in which God gave them a new name to represent a new call on their lives. Paul's two names do not come from a dramatic call moment, rather they come from his background. Paul was a Jew and a Roman citizen. Like so many other people who belong to two worlds and language groups, the apostle had a name for each group: a Jewish name (Saul) and a Roman name (Paul).

Paul grew up in Tarsus, a city in what is now modern-day Turkey. He was born a Roman citizen, which granted him great privilege and status in the empire. It was a rare honor for people living in the provinces of Rome and likely points to his father or grandfather performing some great service to the empire, perhaps military service. This meant that Paul "belonged" in the Roman world. He was an insider.

However, there is another half to Paul's life, or perhaps it is better to say Saul's life. Though his ancestry is in Tarsus with Roman citizenship, Paul was raised for a significant portion of his life in Jerusalem and was educated under one of the finest Jewish Rabbis of his day, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). There was no finer pedigree for proving one's commitment to Jewish faith and heritage than to be trained by a famous Rabbi in Jerusalem. Paul became a passionate religious leader at an early age. He was passionate about suppressing what he saw as a "heretical" new Jewish sect. That group claimed that a man, accused and crucified as a criminal, was actually the long-awaited Jewish Messiah.

This Messiah executed by men appeared to Paul very much alive, even resurrected from the dead. Paul's life was turned upside down when Jesus showed Himself to Paul on the road to Damascus. The sect he had been persecuting was actually central to God's promised redemption. Paul found new purpose in extending this movement to the ends of the earth rather than trying to suppress it. He recognized that God had prepared him for a special role in this movement. As a man of two worlds, he was uniquely suited to bring the good news to gentile people—the Jewish Messiah was the King of the whole world. Paul could easily move between discussing the Jewish Torah and the Greco-Roman athletic games, showing how both worlds can be connected to Jesus. Salvation for the Jews meant salvation for all.



# Corinth the City

When reading New Testament letters, it is helpful to have a basic understanding of the culture in which the letter was received. For example, we would have a different expectation for a letter written to the people of Las Vegas, Nevada, compared to one written to Charleston, South Carolina. Each city is unique with its own strengths and challenges.

The ancient city of Corinth was located at a vital isthmus in Greece. The city had previously been destroyed by Rome but was rebuilt as a Roman colony in 44 B.C. by Julius Caesar. By the time of the New Testament, Corinth was the Roman capital of Greece. Once reestablished, masses of people moved there for new opportunities. The city was financially prospering, leading to many merchants with newfound success. Many of them were former slaves building a new life, desperately wanting to prove they belonged. The Corinthians were spending their wealth to demonstrate that this city deserved to be named as one of the great cities of the empire. Part of this attempt at belonging was the building of temples for worship much like those found in Rome. The desire for prestige and social recognition drove the culture. With rapid growth and wealth came vulgar immorality and gross materialism. Corinth was legendary in Rome for its sexual corruption.


# The Church in Corinth

Paul's missionary work in Corinth is recorded in Acts 18. Paul was coming from serious difficulties and disappointments. In Philippi, he had been beaten, jailed, and run out of town (Acts 16). A riot broke out around Paul's preaching in Thessalonica (Acts 17), and though he had only been with that young church for a short time, he was again run out of town. After a brief stint of ministry in Athens, Paul came to Corinth likely tired and discouraged. In fact, Paul says that he came to the Corinthians "in weakness with great fear and trembling" (1 Corinthians 2:3). He went to the Jews first, telling them in their synagogue that their Messiah had come to Jerusalem, died and rose again. Again, Paul was rejected. So he turned to the non-Jews of Corinth with the gospel message.

Then something special happened. Many Corinthians believed in Jesus. In fact, Paul was able to stay with the new church in Corinth for 18 months, gathering in homes and teaching them about Jesus. (It is probable that Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians during this time.) Many of these new believers likely had little familiarity with the God of Israel. They were living a Roman lifestyle—chasing wealth, significance, and pleasure. Paul taught them about a new way of life, walking in the grace of Jesus, in the way of the cross, and in the power of the Spirit. Then he entrusted the church to local leaders and began his journey back to Jerusalem. A young preacher named Apollos, after some training in Ephesus, would be sent to Corinth to help pastor the church (Acts 19:1).

# The 1st Letter to the Corinthians

After Paul left Corinth, he arrived in Ephesus and spent three years ministering in that city. But Paul's heart never left any of the churches he helped start. He continued to pray regularly for them (1 Corinthians 1:4). Prior to the writing of 1 Corinthians, there had been back-and-forth communication between Paul and church leaders. Two events occurred that spurred Paul to write a letter back to the Corinthian church. First, a group of people from "Chloe's household" came to Paul and told him about divisions growing within the church (1 Corinthians 1:11). Corinthian believers were divided based on which leader they chose to follow. Then, Paul also heard about a case of sexual immorality among them and deep arguments within the church. 1 Corinthians 1-6 addresses this report, critiquing the pursuit of pride and significance within the church. Apparently, the Corinthians had allowed the ways of the city of Corinth to infect how they approached life together in Christ. Paul wrote to remind them that the wisdom of the cross is entirely different.



At some point in his time at Ephesus, Paul also received a letter from the church with a series of pastoral questions. By the time 1 Corinthians was written, the teacher Apollos had joined Paul in Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:12). Perhaps Apollos or some other leader brought the letter to Paul with a series of specific questions. 1 Corinthians 7 begins with “Now concerning the matters you wrote about...” (ESV). Chapters 7-14 address several practical questions the church sent to Paul concerning marriage, worship, and spiritual gifts.

Finally, in chapter 15, Paul reminds the church what is most important, the gospel of Jesus. He reminds them of Jesus’ death, burial, resurrection, and the future hope they have in Him. In chapter 16, Paul makes personal requests for generosity to the poor and sends his pastoral greetings.

1 Corinthians is a special letter for the Christian church because it shows us that the good news about Jesus should shape every aspect of how we live. It should inform and transform the way we see the world and approach life. It is deeply practical and relevant to aspects of morality, community, humility, worship, and hope. Every facet of the Christian life must be shaped by the life of Jesus and the wisdom the Spirit brings. To that end we study Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians.



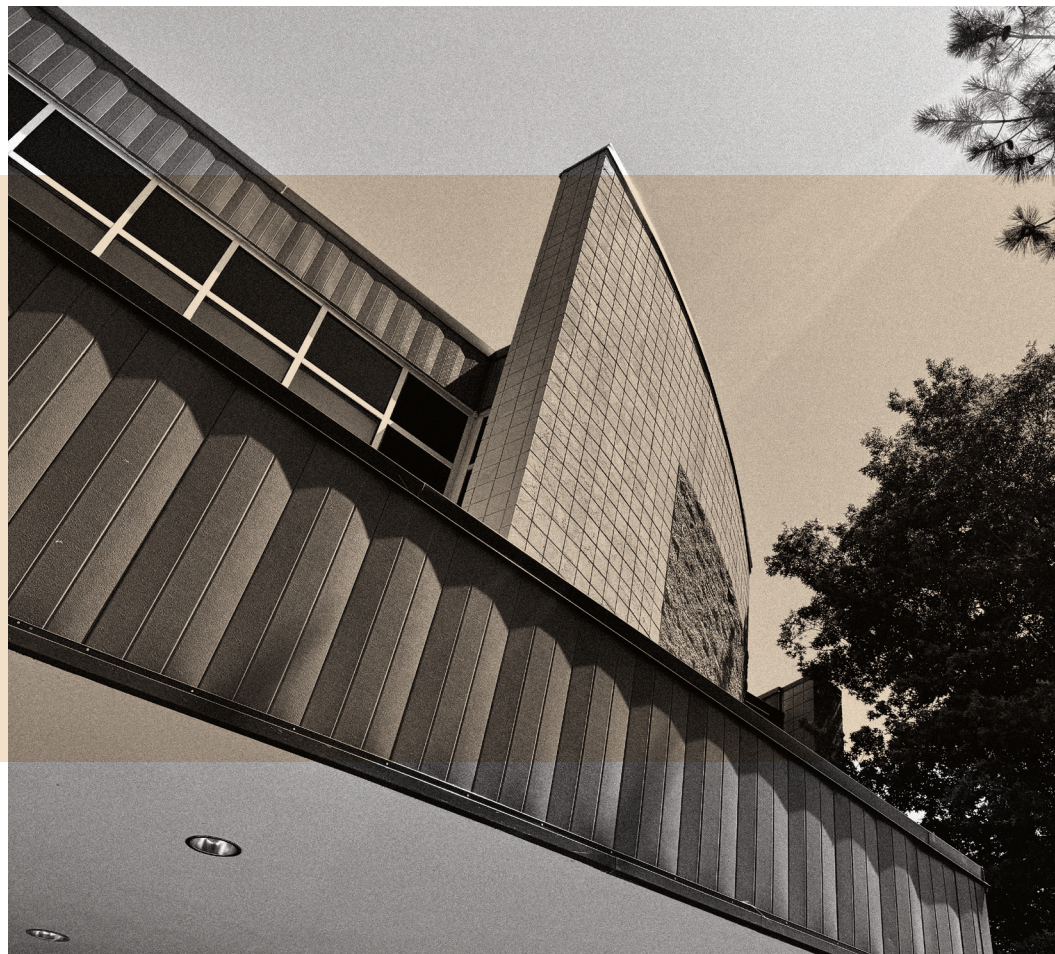
# How to use this Study Guide

The 1 Corinthians Study Guide is laid out in weekly sessions with resources for daily engagement to help us grow together.

Each session includes the following:

- daily readings to guide your study throughout the week
- contextual introduction to aid in the study of the week's passage
- scripture passage for the week
- discussion questions to help you process the passage in personal and small group settings

Use this guide wherever you study 1 Corinthians—in your personal time with God, in small group meetings, and in corporate worship. Discover how Paul's instruction and encouragement to the church at Corinth can guide and encourage you today.



## NEED HELP?

This study guide and included bookmark are designed to help you understand and apply the Scriptures accurately to your life. The Inductive Bible Study Method is an effective tool in accomplishing that goal. This method equips you to make key observations in a passage of scripture, interpret it within its proper context, and then apply it to daily life.



For a brief introduction to the Inductive Bible Study Method, The Training Center of Fellowship Bible Church has prepared helpful videos to get you started. You can watch them at [fellowshipnwa.org/1corinthians](https://fellowshipnwa.org/1corinthians) or simply scan the QR code with your smart phone camera to access the link.

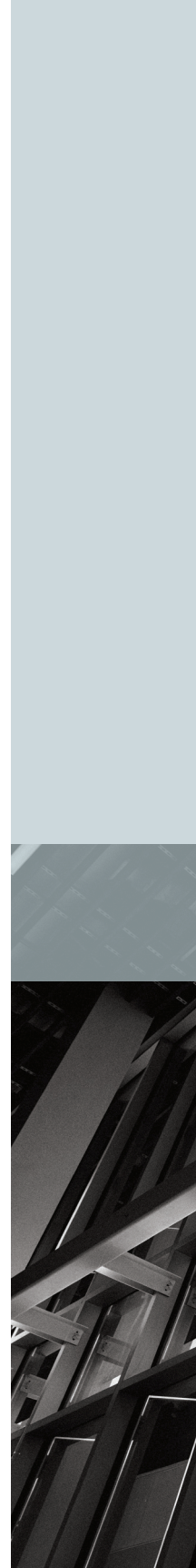
Additionally, The Training Center offers Personal Bible Study, a class that goes much deeper into this method of study. If you have not yet taken this class, we encourage you to do so to experience the riches that come from intentional exploration of God's written Word.

Visit [trainingcenternwa.org/events](https://trainingcenternwa.org/events) to sign up for the next available Personal Bible Study class or contact our Training Center team at [training@fellowshipnwa.org](mailto:training@fellowshipnwa.org) for more information.

# A Visual Exploration of 1 Corinthians

The 1 Corinthians Study Guide explores a visual narrative that merges the ancient world with the contemporary, portraying the theme—*between two worlds*. The use of black and white imagery intersecting dual-color design elements is intended to symbolize the connection between past and future, foundation and the structure built upon it. The central ideas of wisdom and holiness are represented by incorporating photography of libraries, museums, and churches. The typography and layout, inspired by the midcentury Bauhaus design style, reflect the interconnectedness of historical and contemporary worlds. Each chapter unfolds a visual progression, building upon a color palette that transitions and evolves. Through the interplay of ancient and local imagery, this study guide invites the audience to consider how the lessons of Paul’s letter to the Corinthian church can be applied to the modern culture of Northwest Arkansas.

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# Daily Readings

- 01 Acts 18:1-6
- 02 Acts 18:7-8
- 03 Acts 18:9-11
- 04 Acts 18:12-17
- 05 2 Timothy 3:16-17
- 06 Hebrews 4:12
- 07 2 Timothy 2:15

## DISCUSSION GUIDE SUGGESTIONS

This guide helps small groups engage in discussion. Use discretion in determining which questions will work best and be most beneficial. You will likely find a few questions for each lesson that will prompt your group into deeper discussions. You can even create questions of your own. The prompts begin with broad “getting to know one another” questions and lead into deeper observations of the passage, quotes, application thoughts, and prayer suggestions. Blessings to you and your group as you journey with Paul through the complexities of 1 Corinthians.

## GETTING TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER

Introduce yourself to the group, providing current information, (family, where you work, etc.); then share an interesting fact that hardly anyone knows about you.

Share the following with the group: Around people I don't know well, I am often... (choose two)

- \_\_\_ a little shy and uneasy
- \_\_\_ extroverted and confident
- \_\_\_ a little insecure
- \_\_\_ eager to meet new people
- \_\_\_ comfortable
- \_\_\_ curious
- \_\_\_ sometimes too loud

## SHARE YOUR STORY

Share the following with the group. Answer truthfully... except for one. Have the group determine which is false.

- a. My favorite pastime as a kid...
- b. What I wanted to be when I grew up...
- c. My favorite musician/band in high school...
- d. My favorite hobby today...

Give a brief overview of your spiritual journey. Include three to four interesting facts about it and how you have seen God work in your life.

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.

## GOING DEEPER

What inspires you about the life of the Apostle Paul?

What do you think the city of Corinth may have been like? What were some challenges Christians living in Corinth may have faced?

What are things you know about the first letter to the Corinthian church?

What are you hoping to learn from the study of 1 Corinthians?

## COMMIT TO PRAY

Prayer is an essential part of growing together as a group. What is a prayer concern you would like the group to pray for regularly?