



CHAPTER ONE

Welcome to Sin City

Prayer:

O God, how I thank You for fresh starts and new beginnings. I come before You eager and expectant to see what You have planned on this *Live Full, Walk Free* journey. Open my eyes, ears, heart, and mind to all You have prepared for me to learn through Your powerful, life-changing Word. Please remove any and all distractions that could get in the way of my time with You. Lord, I invite You to fill me anew with Your power and strength so that I might truly *live full* and *walk free*. I cannot wait to see what You will do. In the powerful, amazing name of Jesus I pray. Amen.

PART ONE: *Bridging the Gap*

Memory Verse: 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

Hi friends! Are you ready to dig into Bible study? Isn't there something meaningful about Day One, Part One? I adore fresh starts, new gel pens, crisp white pages. And I love the expectation of eye-opening insights and revelations through God's Word!

What are you most looking forward to this season? In what areas of your life do you desire to live more fully and walk more freely? Are there obstacles that prevent you from experiencing all God has for you? Why not take a moment and record your thoughts inside the back cover of this *Live Full, Walk Free* book, and then join me for a road trip back to ancient Corinth.

By the way, my husband John and I did the Corinth road trip (air trip, actually) a few months ago, and I'm bursting with golden tidbits of what we saw firsthand in that captivating place that still yields bold and modern truths for us today. I want you to feel as if you are there with me—walking the paths where the Isthmian athletes trained, running your fingers over the limestone columns of the temple of Apollo, and inhaling air scented by the Gulf of Corinth, just as our brothers and sisters did two thousand years ago.

(Warning: This opening section may seem a teensy bit “educational,” but hang with me, friend. Not every day will be as much history, I promise.)

Whenever we begin studying a book or section of the Bible, it's crucial—and fascinating—to gain an understanding of the original

setting in which it was written. What was the society like? Are we talking about a big city or a quaint rural town? Were the people wealthy or poor, slaves or free? Since there are two millennia between us and these particular Corinthians, we are going to add time travel to our armchair travel experience. The better we really *get* their lives, culture, and times, the better we understand Paul's meaning, for them, *and for us*.

As we begin to un-scroll the book of 1 Corinthians, let's lean in and peek through the portal of time at Corinth, the Sin City of its day. Getting our bearings in Corinth will make our trek through this book all the more memorable.

For all my map-loving friends, here are some insights into the geography of the area to help you get oriented:



Beginning on the left, you'll see the boot of Italy, Greece in the center, and then ancient Asia Minor, present-day Turkey, on the far right.

City: Greece is divided into two parts—upper Greece and lower Greece, which is also known as the Peloponnese peninsula. Do you see the city of Corinth situated there in the middle? Corinth was located near a four-mile-wide isthmus which served as a land-bridge between the mainland of Greece and the Peloponnese region to the south.

Because of its strategic location with *two* active harbors, Corinth was one of the most bustling port cities of its day. Like the center of an hourglass, everything passed through Corinth.

Corinth's prime location fueled its prosperity and wealth, and made it a multicultural magnet. Tourists packed the place out, and spent money on lodging, food, and luxury products and services provided by a host of entrepreneurs. You could do some serious damage shopping in the market, picking up Arabian balsam, Phoenician dates, Libyan ivory, Babylonian carpets, Cilician goat's hair, and Lycaonian wool.¹ Sounds like Corinth made a fabulous place for a girlfriends' shopping getaway!

People: After a tumultuous history, Corinth was established as a Roman colony in 44 BC.² As an international trade center, Corinth was populated with mainly Romans, Greeks, and Jews; plus Syrians, Asians, and Egyptians too. It is estimated that in Paul's day 250,000 free persons and some 400,000 slaves called Corinth home, not to mention the thousands of tradesmen, sailors, and tourists who visited.³



If we do the math, $250,000 + 400,000 =$ approximately _____ people from all over the known world made their home in Corinth.



How does your city compare in size to Corinth? What nationalities and backgrounds make up your community?

Culture: We know Corinth was rich, with an economy humming like a well-oiled Bentley. It also had a serious reputation for illicit activities and behaviors. Anything went in Corinth—and I do mean *anything*. As we explore the city, consider three important words describing their culture: indulgent, idolatrous, and immoral.

✿ **Indulgent:** Because of its wealth, Corinth became a city of luxury and lavishness. The affluent citizens developed an unapologetic love of possessions and pleasure. Overindulgence was the objective and pleasure the goal.

✿ **Idolatrous:** In Corinth, gods and goddesses ruled, and religious expressions were incredibly varied. You could worship the assorted gods of Egypt, Rome, and Greece—your choice. There was the Jewish synagogue, plus temples, shrines, and statues on nearly every corner. Religious activities were part of everyday life, too. (“Honey, on your way home from worshipping Aphrodite, could you grab a pint of goat’s milk?”)

✿ **Immoral:** Around the whole ancient world, Corinth acquired a reputation for depravity, wickedness, and filth. In the ancient Greek plays, if an actor was portraying a Corinthian citizen, he/she was usually drunk and recklessly involved with the Greek party life and prostitutes.

In fact, the term *Corinthian girl* meant “prostitute,” and *korinthiazesthai*—to live like a Corinthian—meant to live with drunken and immoral depravity.⁴ Sex was *everywhere*, in every shape, form, and perversion.

*Anything went
in Corinth—
and I do mean
anything.*

Were the Corinthians embarrassed about their sinful status? Oh no—the Corinthians were loud and proud about their reputation. Immorality was one of the city’s most publicized attractions. Corinth’s reputation implied that you were *going* to fall into damaging behaviors, and engage in activities that were secret, hidden, and shameful—it was expected and celebrated!



In 1 Corinthians 6:9–10, Paul lists some of the specific sins for which the city was noted and which formerly described many believers in the Corinthian church. Record them below:

Indulgent. Idolatrous. Immoral. Yet in this hotbed of wickedness, the most unlikely place in all the Greek world, God was at work, preparing to shake things up in Sin City. An important visitor was on his way to Corinth, and this shame-soaked city would never be the same.


Digging Deeper


The apostle Paul, the first-century missionary God used to author 1–2 Corinthians, arrived in Corinth for the first time in approximately 51 AD. Do you think Paul had his work cut out for him as he sought to make a difference in this pagan, corrupt culture? Yes? Me too!


Let’s dig into God’s Word and refresh our memory regarding Paul’s own journey from darkness to light.




Read Acts 8:3, which records the first persecution of the early church. How is Saul (Saul is his Hebrew name, Paul is his Greek name) involved?

 **Read Acts 9:1–22**, the first of three accounts of Saul’s conversion to Christ.⁵ What does Saul’s transformation—from murderer of Christ followers to passionate messenger for Jesus—teach us about the nature of God?

 In Acts 13:9, Saul is called Paul for the first time. According to this verse, where did Paul receive his power for ministry?

 **Read Acts 26:15–20**. How did Paul respond to the call God placed on his life? What became his new message?

 **Turn back to Acts 9:15** and write the verse below. Circle the word(s) God used to describe Paul to Ananias, and underline what God desired to accomplish through Paul.

May we never misjudge the “instruments” or “tools” God uses to fulfill His kingdom plans and purposes. Thankfully, He doesn’t require someone with a picture-perfect past. Instead, with merely mustard-seed faith, a willing heart, and a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit, God can accomplish immeasurably more than we could ever dare ask, dream, or imagine.



DIFFERENCES



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PART TWO: *Paul's Arrival in Corinth*

Memory Verse: 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

I'll never forget the first time I heard the life-changing words of the gospel. My personal life before Christ was a mess: after a childhood filled with intense hurts and rejection, I attempted to numb my pain with everything the world had to offer—food, men, alcohol, drugs, even shopping. You name it, I tried it, but nothing worked. My heart was sick with guilt and shame for the awful choices I knew I was making.

Before long, I was at the mercy of a serious drug and alcohol addiction. Every moment was motivated and driven by my addictions. I knew this was not the best life for me and my young son, but I didn't know how to stop. That is, until the dreadful day when I accidentally overdosed on cocaine and nearly died. After being rushed to the hospital, our local law enforcement agency became involved and my self-destructive ways were finally laid bare and exposed to all.

In the midst of my mess, I made a phone call to a joyful customer named Carole who frequented the restaurant where I worked. I didn't know this woman well, but I knew there was something different about her, and I wanted what she had. After listening to my troubles, Carole bravely shared four simple but transformational words—"Cindy, you need Jesus." Carole also explained from God's Word the full, free life available in Christ. Since I'd sampled pretty

much everything the world offered yet still felt empty inside, I figured I didn't have anything to lose if I gave this "Jesus thing" a try.

On July 26, 1996, I invited Jesus Christ to take control of my life. Best decision ever!

If my life is a living testament to anything, it's this: God uses broken people for His beautiful purposes. How else do we explain how a former drug addict turns from "rock bottom" to restored Bible teacher? Or Paul's transformation from forceful Pharisaical fanatic to passionate follower of Christ?

Only God.

In Christ, our previous choices—the good, the bad, and even the ugly—can become the springboard to propel us forward into passionate, purpose-filled living. Thankfully God doesn't see our past; He sees our kingdom potential.

Paul knew this to be true. He understood to his core the transforming power of Jesus. Thus he became the perfect fit as God's messenger to the corrupt city of Corinth. God would use Paul to turn this warped culture upside down for Jesus' sake.

Let's join Paul as he traveled for the first time to Corinth.



Read Acts 18:1–11. How long did Paul spend in Corinth (v. 11)?



What would those months have been like for Paul? Imagine what he would have observed while living in immoral Corinth, and record your thoughts:

Paul would have witnessed things that distressed, frustrated, and angered him. He would have walked among the worshipers of false gods at the temples. He would have stood on the streets as vulgar parade floats passed by and heard the raucous noise of drunken



Greek dinner parties. Perhaps he would have even watched as prostitutes strolled by each night. For most Corinthians, this was mundane, everyday life.



Flip ahead to 1 Corinthians 2:3–5. How did Paul describe his emotional state as he entered the city?

Can you blame Paul for being afraid as he entered this wicked place? Besides, before arriving in Corinth, Paul had been stoned in Lystra (Acts 14:19), stripped and whipped in Philippi (Acts 16:22–24), and barely escaped a riot in Thessalonica (Acts 17:10). Paul was terrified entering Corinth, fearing his work would be cut short by opposing Jews or the overwhelming worldliness around him. I would be shaking in my sparkly shoes for sure. How about you?

*... our
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Even so, what *did* Paul do while he was in Corinth (Acts 18:11)?

Paul's ministry is described simply: he faithfully taught God's Word. Paul knew a strong church in this influential city could spread the life-changing message of Jesus all over Greece and then throughout the known world.

Did you notice Paul did not arrive in Corinth with a five-step self-help strategy, a persuasive power point, or an outstanding outreach agenda? No way.

Instead, Paul went empowered by the Holy Spirit, moment by moment. The Spirit gave Paul the right words to say, whether he was talking to a wealthy merchant, a drunken sailor, or an Isthmian Games athlete. And that same Spirit can give us the perfect words when we don't know what to say to the friends, neighbors, and strangers who cross our paths every single day.

Digging Deeper

Can you imagine what it would have been like to sit under the apostle Paul's instruction? As a trained rabbinic scholar, Paul would have memorized at least most of the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament) as well as the Prophets.⁶ Wow—makes six memory verses look easy! Given Paul's fiery passion, zeal, and knowledge of the Old Testament, I'm guessing his talks would have been anything but boring and monotonous. In fact, Acts 13:42–43 tells us as Paul and Barnabas once finished teaching, the people begged them to come back the next week and speak more. A communicator's dream! (Side note: Peek at Acts 13:44 to see what happened when Paul and Barnabas returned the next week. Awesome!)

Scripture doesn't say what Paul communicated during his initial visit with the Corinthians, but we can view his correspondence with them as well as his other letters to give us an indication of his message. Wherever he went, Paul laid the same foundation: Jesus.



Read 1 Corinthians 15:1–8. What does verse 1 tell us Paul preached to the brothers and sisters in Corinth?

In case you—like me—didn't grow up with a foundation of faith, the words *gospel* or *Good News* may sound confusing and/or “churchy.” The *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia* describes the gospel this way:

WELCOME TO SIN CITY

The central truth of the gospel is that God has provided a way of salvation for men (and women) through the gift of His son to the world. He suffered as a sacrifice for sin, overcame death, and now offers a share in His triumph to all who will accept it. The gospel is good news because it is a gift of God, not something that must be earned by penance or by self-improvement.⁷

Who is offered a share in Christ's triumph? It's just a little three-letter word, but boy, is it powerful. Circle the word *all* above.

All means *you*, friend. Now draw a line through the words *penance* and *self-improvement*. Goodbye self-punishment and working hard to win God's approval! Those things are simply not required to receive the gift of God.



Did you note how Paul succinctly summarized the essence of the gospel? Write out the key points from 1 Corinthians 15:3–4:

15:3

15:4a

15:4b

Of first importance to Paul when he arrived in Corinth was to share the life-changing, liberating message of Jesus Christ—available to *all*. Regardless of who you were, in spite of what you had done, or no matter what had been done to you—Paul knew only the power of the gospel could transform this corrupted community from darkness to light, from pleasure-seeking to purpose-filled living, from captivity to freedom.

Consider how the gospel would have radically shaken up this idol-filled culture. Paul's teachings would have been revolutionary! No longer would you have to sacrifice an animal at the temple of Apollo or bow down before Poseidon or other deities of mythology. No more would you have to participate in ritualistic, drunken behavior and sexual acts at Aphrodite's temple of love. If you were sick, you wouldn't have to ever again seek healing through clay offerings at the temple of Asclepius. To receive the free gift of life in Christ, you didn't have to *do* anything—it had already been *done* for you on the cross through Christ.

What Good News! Are you curious how Paul's message was received? Did the Corinthians toss Paul right out of town, insisting, like the Athenians, that he was a “babbler” who didn't know what he was doing?⁸



Read Acts 18:8 below and circle the people who heard Paul, and underline how they responded.

Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many who heard Paul believed and were baptized.

May we never underestimate the power of the gospel! Skeptics must have questioned Paul's goals. “Corinth? That wicked community? They'll never change!” But Paul proclaimed anyway. “You need Jesus.”

And soon he became the first pastor of a new community of Christ followers founded in Corinth.

Don't get me wrong: Paul didn't have it trouble-free. Not everyone wanted to hear his countercultural message. But by the end of his first visit in Corinth, the early church was relatively stable and secure, and Paul set sail and continued his missionary journey.

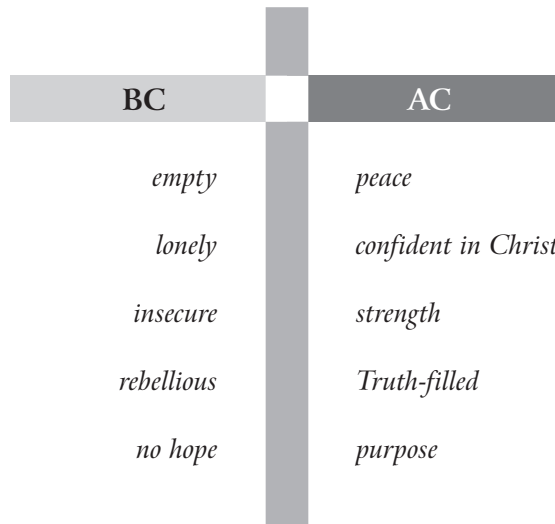
Apply It



What does the message of the cross mean to you? Check any/all of the options below:

- ☐ I'm not sure yet what the gospel means. I need to learn more.
- ☐ It's easy to go through my daily life forgetting about the cross.
- ☐ The gospel changed everything for me. I was blind, but now I see!
- ☐ Because of the gospel, I now have fresh faith and power.
- ☐ I've heard so much about the gospel over the years that sometimes I forget how transformational it is.

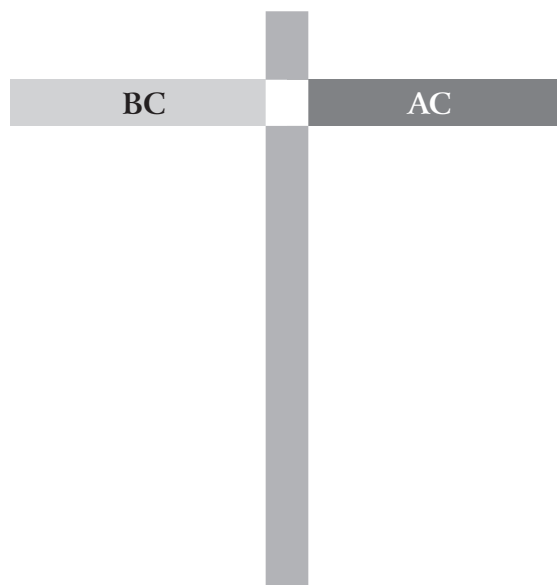
If you are a Christ follower, take a few moments and reflect on how Jesus has changed your life. Using the cross diagram on the next page, describe your life BC (before Christ), when/how you were introduced to Jesus, and then how your life is now different AC (after Christ). I'll go first as an example.



July 1996

Heard about Jesus from Carole and invited Him to be my Lord and Savior.

Your turn:



Whether you have been following Christ your whole life, whether you can identify with my wayward past, or whether you have just recently made this life-changing decision—your story matters! And your story could be the bridge for someone who desperately needs to hear about Jesus. May I encourage you to share this cross exercise with someone this week? Let's celebrate and share the power of the cross!

If this is your first time hearing about the Good News of Jesus, please remember, the invitation is for *all*—the sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, greedy, even the gossips are welcomed.⁹ *No one* is too far gone; not one person has out-sinned the grace and mercy of God. (See what Good News it is!)

If you have not made this life-changing decision, would you prayerfully consider doing so now? If you would like to know beyond

any doubt that you've opened the door to a relationship with Jesus Christ, I invite you to pray a simple but powerful prayer. Please know there's no magic in the words—it's not the words that save you but your faith in Jesus.

Dear God, I admit I am a sinner. I believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for me, and that He rose again. Please come into my life. I choose to surrender to You. I invite You to take over the controls of my life. Thank You for Your great love for me. In Jesus' name. Amen.

If you prayed just now, welcome to the family of God! You have God's promise that you are His child. You are forgiven and will spend eternity with Him, and He can change you just as He has and is still changing me.

Why not sign and date this page so you will always remember this significant, life-changing day on your spiritual journey. I would also encourage you to share your decision with someone. Maybe it's the person who invited you to Bible study, another close friend, or your *Live Full, Walk Free* leader. I would love to hear from you too!

May we never underestimate the power of the gospel! The message that points to Christ on the cross seems like sheer silliness to those hell-bent on destruction, but for those on the way of salvation, it makes perfect sense!¹⁰

PART THREE: *Know the Truth*

Memory Verse: 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

Have you ever wished you could be a “fly on the wall”—an unnoticed observer of a noteworthy situation? As a mom of four kids, I often think it would be fascinating to secretly listen in and shadow my children throughout their school day. What’s it really like on their bus ride? How’s the conversation in the gym locker room? Is anyone unkind to them? Do they actually eat their lunch, or does it mostly end up in the garbage? Inquiring minds want to know!

Of course, I can hear my tweens telling me now, “Mom, that’s creepy.” I’m not saying I *do* lurk in the lunchroom or the bushes, stalking my children, but you can’t blame a mom for being curious, right?



How about for you, friend? Is there a particular area of your life where you’d enjoy being a “fly on the wall” for a day? Name it below, if you’d like.

As we continue learning from Paul and his relationship with the new church of Corinth, I think it would be grand to be a “fly on the wall” in this age-old assembly of believers. What was the overall tone of Paul’s messages? Did he get teary-eyed as he reflected on his Damascus Road experience? Was Paul ever funny, or was he always impassioned and serious?



What would you be curious to learn as an unnoticed observer in Corinth's early church?

As we've discovered, the Bible *does* confirm Paul spent at least eighteen months helping the rookie church in Corinth gain its footing in their slippery society. How? By building a firm foundation based on the Word of God (Acts 18:11).

Remember however, the New Testament was yet to be written. Let's not picture a bunch of believers walking through the marketplace carrying their brand-new Bibles, colored pencils, and index cards on their way to Bible study.

When Paul mentions God's Word, he is referring to the Old Testament Hebrew Scriptures in their Greek form. (To be precise, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures is called the Septuagint.) Besides, no more than 10 percent of the people in New Testament times could read,¹¹ so Bibles wouldn't have helped most of the population, even if they were available.

Instead, in the midst of homes all throughout the sin-soaked city, small communities gathered and listened intently as Paul shared his treasures of knowledge and insights with them. Paul wanted these new Christ followers to *know* the truth, *live* the truth, and then *share* the truth—believing a community of Christians in this popular crossroads city would not only transform their corrupt community but could impact the whole world for Christ!

Digging Deeper

In case you are thinking, “What truth are you talking about, Cindy? What *is* the truth?”—when we refer to Paul's desire for the Corinthian Christ followers to *know*, *live*, and *share* truth, we are talking about the eternal truths found in God's Holy Word. God's Word

is the standard against which everything else must be tested and compared. Paul knew if the Corinthians had any hope of stability and security in their slip n' slide world, they had to gain traction on God's powerful promises.

This was deeply personal to Paul. He understood how the power of the Word works mightily inside a believer—transforming our thinking, enlarging our vision, forcing darkness out of our mind, and whooshing like a mighty force into every part of our life.



How has knowing the truth of God's Word made a difference in your life? Is there a passage of Scripture that has been especially meaningful to you on your faith journey?

Knowing the truth is wonderful—but there is more, isn't there?

Lukewarm Christians, non-believers, and even the enemy of our souls can *know* the truth.¹² Paul wanted Christ followers to *live* the truth. As followers of Christ, our behavior, speech, attitude, and actions should reflect God's character and goodness. It's through experiencing God's Word and applying its truth to our everyday circumstances that our lives are changed and we fully experience freedom.

Although we don't know the exact spiritual principles Paul taught the new Corinthian church members, we can gain an understanding by observing his communication with other churches he founded. Let's consider the letter he wrote to the Ephesians, a church gathering located in a sinful port city directly across the Aegean Sea from Corinth.



Look up the following verses and briefly summarize the instructions Paul communicated to the early Christ followers living in the immoral, idolatrous city of Ephesus.



Ephesians 5:1

Ephesians 5:3

Ephesians 5:11

Ephesians 5:18

Although Paul wrote these words to the Ephesians *after* his stay in Corinth, my sense is he would have given similar instructions during the eighteen months he was forming the Corinthian church. In both locations, the twisted cultures of their cities had crept into the church, to the point where little set them apart from their loose-living neighbors. Rather than modeling a new and better way to live, the early Christ followers' lives looked just like everyone else's.

Now let's be real: would it have been easy to live out these truth-filled principles in an immoral, anything-goes community? I think we'd agree—absolutely not! The peer pressure must have been unbelievable, the temptations oh so luring.

Everyone is tempted by different things. Let's take sex, for example. If sexual sin was your greatest, hardest-to-resist temptation, living a wholesome, disciplined life in Corinth would have been difficult. Sex and opportunities to have it were everywhere. In Corinth, "normal" included a girl generally being married at

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about age sixteen . . . to a man twice her age. Apart from the wedding night, it was common for married couples to sleep in separate beds, with mistresses also living in the home. Not to mention, men used female prostitutes regularly, whether at one of the countless brothels, the temple, or even at a dinner party as the “after dinner” entertainment.

Can you imagine how the mouths of the early Christians must have dropped open when Paul encouraged them to no longer live with even a “hint of sexual immorality”? Living this new way would have been a completely foreign idea! “(In Corinth) the idea that sexual immorality was wrong was like you and I saying having a cup of coffee in the morning is wrong,” writes Pastor Jim Cymbala. “It was unknown. It was insane. . . . But Paul didn’t care. He preached it.”¹³

Heaven forbid anyone ever teaching that having a cup of coffee is wrong! I would be sunk. (And all my coffee-loving friends said “Amen!”) But may we remember—*nothing* is too difficult with the power of God at work. Romans 8:26 tells us that God’s Spirit helps us in our weaknesses, and Jesus promises Christians, “With God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26; Mark 10:27). God doesn’t want us to remain as we were when He called us, but instead, we’re invited to experience and enjoy life, and have it in abundance—to the full, till it overflows (John 10:10 AMP). Let’s pursue lives of truth.

Know the truth. *Live* the truth. But also, we must *share* the truth with others.

Personally I am super passionate about this subject. You see, no one ever shared the truth of God with me until I was twenty-six years old. No, I didn’t live on an island, in a corn field, or the forest. I grew up in a conservative community with a church on nearly every corner. During my loneliest and most painful season, I worked as a pregnant, single waitress in a family-friendly restaurant frequented by Bible-carrying Christians. Nobody ever invited me to church or left a personal note scribbled on a receipt. Not a soul ever

whispered in my ear “Hey, did anyone ever tell you how much God loves you?”

I’ll never forget when a Christian counselor opened up God’s Word and shared Jeremiah 29:11–13 with me for the very first time. I didn’t even know Jeremiah was *in* the Bible. Yet the amazing *truth* that I could call upon a loving and holy God, and He would hear from *me*, infused unbelievable peace and hope into my pain-filled soul.

I couldn’t help but wonder in the days to come, “God, how come no one ever told me? How come nobody ever shared your life-changing Word with me?”

May it not be said of us, “No one ever told me.” Not on our watch. Truth this transformational is meant to be shared.

So back to the ol’ “fly on the wall.” Would unseen observers in my home, in your home, say, “Now that’s a woman who *knows* the truth, *lives* the truth, and isn’t afraid to *share* the truth—in love—with others”?

Apply It

How are you doing at knowing, living, and sharing the truth?



On a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest, mark a “K,” “L,” and “S” for how well you know, live and share the truth.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Please know this exercise is not meant to bring about guilt or condemnation, and we won’t ask you to share it in your small group. Let’s just take an honest assessment for the purpose of a starting place, asking God to help us move forward.

Live Full Walk Free



After you've marked your scale, reflect on what led you to pick each number? What is one practical thing you can do this week to help your number go up one notch? Write your thoughts below.

To go from a ____ to a ____ when it comes to *knowing* the truth, I could . . .

To go from a ____ to a ____ when it comes to *living* the truth, I could . . .

To go from a ____ to a ____ when it comes to *sharing* the truth, I could . . .

Wherever you are on the scale, remember, perfection is not our goal, just progress. We've got to start somewhere, right?



Peek at the list from Part One you wrote on the inside back cover of this book. Are there passages of Scripture that can help you in these areas? Take a few moments to reflect on your list of current obstacles, and then write a prayer asking God to help you *know*, *live*, and *share* truth.



PART FOUR: *Got Issues?*

Memory Verse: 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

Last month I made the dreaded visit to the doctor for my annual checkup. It's not that I don't like my physician—it's those dismal numbers I could do without. Somehow my weight keeps creeping up, while my height slowly creeps down! I'd much rather spend the afternoon pulling weeds—and I don't garden—than getting poked, prodded, and repeatedly reminded of my age and the “changes” yet to come. Good grief.

There was a spot of comedy, though, amid all those unfortunate numbers. “Do you have any issues we should be aware of, Mrs. Bultema?” the spunky nurse asked. I nearly burst out laughing. “Issues? Do I have any issues? How much time do you have?”

As I write this lesson, I have a band on my right arm to relieve my tennis elbow, a sty in my left eye, and a sore throat and raspy voice. There's a dead Christmas tree in the backyard (it's mid-March), my naughty dog Rocky drives me bonkers, and a woodpecker is making his summer home in the side of my house. And those are just the *surface* issues. If I were really honest, I've got issues to work through on the inside as well—like fear, insecurities, comparisons, and an unhealthy attachment to sparkling flavored water.



Do you have any issues you are dealing with? Take a minute and jot down a list of some of the cares and concerns you are faced with these days. (Sometimes it just helps to write them down.)

Your issues may be different than my issues, but I think it's fair to say we all have them. Whether we are young or old, wealthy or poor, sick or healthy, go to church or don't go to church, live in a condo, apartment, or our mother-in-law's basement—we all have issues.

As we've discovered, the Corinthian church members were not immune to issues, big and small. In fact, there's no way I would trade my creeping weight, stye in my eye, dead Christmas tree, and assorted insecurities for the problems faced by my brothers and sisters in first-century Corinth. Let's travel back to Corinth and take a look at some of the issues bearing down on the newly founded church. We'll be encouraged as we see how Paul tried to restore balance in this unsteady, issue-laden community of believers.

Digging Deeper

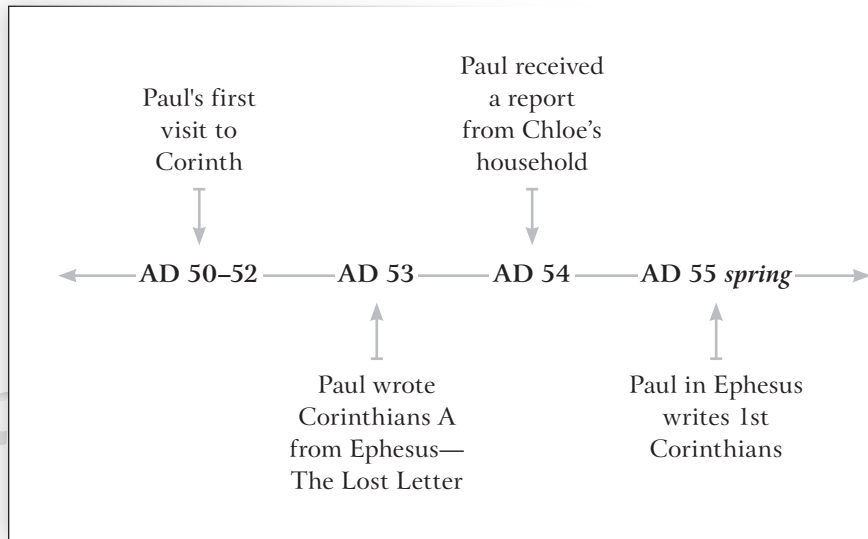
If I asked you how many letters Paul wrote to the Corinthians, chances are you probably would answer two—First and Second Corinthians.



Before you respond, **turn to 1 Corinthians 5:9** and write out the first half of the verse below.

What letter is Paul talking about here? Let's take a moment to peek at a quick time line with approximate dates, and I'll try to clarify Paul's early Corinthian correspondence.

(Note: If the thought of a time line feels too much like school-work, skip right over it. I won't pop out of your kitchen closet and give you a quiz, promise.)



51 AD—Paul arrived in Corinth for the first time.

We know from Scripture that Paul spent at least eighteen months in Corinth doing what? (Review Acts 18:11 for a reminder.)

After the new church was settled, Paul continued on his missionary journey, ending up in the city of Ephesus. Using the map on the next page, put a “C” for “church” near the city of Corinth, and place a “P” for Paul near the city of Ephesus, Paul’s home base for the next few years.



52 AD—Apollos, an “eloquent man, mighty in the Scriptures,” went to Corinth to serve as the second pastor (Acts 18:24; 19:1). Add an “A” for Apollos to the map near Corinth.

53 AD— Paul wrote a letter of instruction to the Corinthians, now referred to as the “previous letter” you read about in 1 Corinthians 5:9.

Where is this “previous letter?” Nobody knows. This ancient letter no longer exists— it was lost without a trace. Scholars call it Paul’s “Corinthians A” letter ¹⁴ or simply the “lost letter.”

I’m glad to know I’m not the only one who loses important things.

54 AD—While Paul was still in Ephesus, a woman named Chloe sent some of her household to him to report problems within the Corinthian church. I think this is what my kids would call a “tattletale.” This delegation described to Paul the disastrous state of their church.



Read the following verses to get a sampling of the issues, and write a small description of each challenge they faced.

1 Corinthians 1:10–11

1 Corinthians 3:3

1 Corinthians 5:1

1 Corinthians 6:6–7

1 Corinthians 11:21

1 Corinthians 15:12



Which issue is most surprising to you? Explain your answer.

No doubt about it—the Corinthian church had issues! Strife and division were seriously threatening the young church. Some had become spiritually arrogant, leading to further problems such as sexual misbehavior, wrongs against other believers, abuse of spiritual gifts, and misunderstanding of basic Christian teachings. What a royal mess.

“What happened?” you might be thinking. “I thought they *knew* the truth.” You’re right—they did. Although the Corinthian Christ

followers had been taught of the new freedom and life available in Jesus, they quickly slid back into their old sinful habits and patterns. One author shares:

The problem with the church in Corinth was the *Christians* in Corinth. They were so enamored with the secular lifestyle that they didn't want to give it up. They lived in a culture that emphasized self-importance, ambition, and status. That's the mind-set they had before they were Christians, and they brought those same feelings into their church.¹⁵

Sound familiar? Underline any parts of the quote that sounds similar to our modern culture today.

Can you imagine how Paul—after having spent nearly two years pouring his life and love into this church—would have felt to receive this upsetting update? Though a few years had passed since he had been with them, Paul felt a spiritual responsibility for the young church of Corinth, and this news troubled him immensely.

About the same time, Paul also received a personal letter from some of the Corinthian church members. They had a number of specific questions they wanted to ask their founding pastor about Christian behavior, lifestyle, and doctrine. Can you blame them? Clearly, living out God's truth in their sin-flooded culture was not easy, and as first-generation Christians, they didn't have the luxury of following their parents' example.

55 AD—Paul wrote the letter we now call First Corinthians. His intent was twofold:

1. To reply to the shocking report from Chloe's household.
2. To respond to the church members' questions.

What were they asking? We can get a sense of their inquiries by reading Paul's personal response to them.



Look up the following verses to determine the various topics the church members questioned Paul about, and match them to the list of concerns on the right.

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 Corinthians 7:1–3 • | • Food sacrificed to idols |
| 1 Corinthians 7:25 • | • Collection at church |
| 1 Corinthians 8:1 • | • Married life |
| 1 Corinthians 12:1 • | • Virgins/unmarried |
| 1 Corinthians 16:1 • | • Spiritual gifts |



Which subject matter is most surprising to you? Reflect on what we've learned about the Corinthians so far. Are there any topics you are surprised *not* to see on the list?

It's not so much what the believers were asking about, but rather what they were *not* asking about. Seems kind of fishy to me that they skipped right over biggies such as inner strife, pride, incest, and sleeping with prostitutes, and they asked instead about the relief offering for the poor. Basically, they were throwing him softballs. Were they hoping Paul would not find out about their appalling behavior? One scholar thinks so, imagining the Corinthian church members having little huddles that went like this:

We can't write to Paul about incest and sleeping with prostitutes. Besides, if we do commit such problems to writing, and send them as a letter—the letter could circulate across the church. If that happens, what would the other churches think of us? No self-respecting community hangs its dirty laundry in the front garden. No, no—we will ask him about things like divorce, remarriage and marriage to unbelievers—you know—the kinds of topics that can be discussed comfortably in public meetings.¹⁶

The Corinthians' sanitized list of questions reminds me of the "safe" prayer requests shared during small group gatherings. You know how it goes—stresses are high, patience is low, messes are many, and everything in you wants to run, numb out, and/or stuff the pain—but when it's your turn to share a personal prayer request, you ask for prayer for your uncle's neighbor's friend's Aunt Sue. Not that there is anything wrong about praying for Aunt Sue, but why not bring up the real issues robbing you of your peace and joy? Why not share how you are *really* doing? (Am I the only one who wrestles with this?)

The point here is this: We will never experience all God has for us until we identify the *real* issues weighing us down and tripping us up on our faith journey.

Apply It



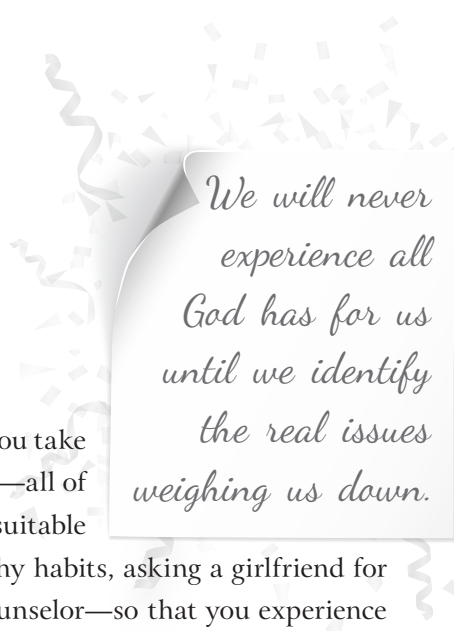
What issues are getting in the way of your living a full, free life? If Paul were writing a letter to *you*, what would be some of the concerns he might ask you to address on your faith journey? Circle any of the following that apply:

- | | | |
|----------|---------------|-----------------|
| Debt | Legalism | Gluttony |
| Jealousy | Materialism | Fear |
| Guilt | Unforgiveness | Addiction |
| Self | Pride | Lies |
| Anger | Gossip | Comparisons |
| Anxiety | Worry | Critical spirit |
| Shame | Perfectionism | Painful past |
| Other: | | |

WELCOME TO SIN CITY



Take time to review your list and then prayerfully journal your thoughts below.

A decorative graphic featuring a white rectangular box with a curled top-left corner, containing text. The box is surrounded by a cloud of small, light gray confetti and streamers.

*We will never
experience all
God has for us
until we identify
the real issues
weighing us down.*

My prayer for you is this: May you take a risk and bring your issues to Jesus—all of them. And then may you take any suitable “next steps”—saying no to unhealthy habits, asking a girlfriend for help, or going to see a Christian counselor—so that you experience the peace-filled, abundant life that is yours in Christ. You are not alone, sweet friend. Please don’t wait another day.

PART FIVE. *Special Delivery*

Memory Verse: 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

Letter writing is becoming a dying art. Rather than putting pen to paper, we zip off texts, tweets, and emails—transmitting a message within mere twinkles of time. In our high-speed life and times, the youth are most affected by this change in communication. According to a poll commissioned by World Vision, four out of ten seven- to fourteen-year-olds have not received a letter in the past year, and 20 percent of children say they have *never* received a single letter in their lifetime. Plus, more than 25 percent have not written a letter in the past year, and one in ten has never written one.¹⁷ Can you imagine?



When was the last time you penned a letter to someone? To whom was it written?

Two thousand years ago, letters were not exactly *whoosh*, *zoom*, *whiz*. Words that might describe how long it took to first write and then send a letter are *forever*, *ages*, and *eons*. Talk about “snail mail”!

Thankfully Paul made it a priority to send personal letters to select individuals and churches he encountered on his gospel-sharing journeys. He wrote a whole series of letters to the confused congregation of Christ followers situated in depraved Corinth. Paul needed

to address the variety of serious moral errors plaguing the spiritually struggling church—and without delay.



Read 1 Corinthians 1:1–9, in more than one Bible translation if possible. (A second version can illuminate different aspects of the verse by using varied terms and expressions.¹⁸) Pay attention to Paul’s tone, words, and repeated ideas as well as anything unpredicted or surprising to you. Note your findings below.



Did you note Paul’s tone? Anyone else surprised by the opening of the Corinthian correspondence? If you were in Paul’s shoes, how would *you* have started your letter to this wayward church?

If I had written that letter, the tone may have been slightly different. I’m afraid the Mad Mama in me may have come out in full force. I might have given them a good old-fashioned written lecture—complete with lots of exclamation points and words in all caps. “Come on, friends, you KNOW better! It’s time for YOU to shape up—or else! Don’t make me come over there! I. Am. Not. Kidding!” (My kids know that when I verbally punctuate after each word, it ain’t gonna be pretty.)

So Paul’s manner is surprising—and revealing. In spite of his first readers’ willful sins and weaknesses, Paul didn’t launch into a stern scolding, questioning their fading faith. He didn’t even encourage them to pack their personal belongings and hop the next boat out of town. Instead, Paul—inspired by the Holy Spirit—opened by affirming their identity and reminding them of the truth—who they are in Christ.

Digging Deeper

If you've sent an email message lately, you know there is a standard four-part header including: To, From, Date, and Subject. Most letters written in the first century also followed a basic customary salutation, outlined as follows: Sender, Recipient, Greeting, and Thanksgiving. Paul included each of those elements in the opening verses of 1 Corinthians.



Review 1 Corinthians 1:1–9 and summarize Paul's salutation.

	VERSE	PAUL'S GREETING IN 1 CORINTHIANS
Sender(s)	1:1	
Recipient(s)	1:2	
Greeting	1:3	
Thanksgiving	1:4–9	



Who does Paul list as the additional sender of this letter? Underline his name in the table.

Sosthenes who? Scholars believe he may have been Paul's secretary, who recorded this letter as Paul dictated it. He was probably the Jewish synagogue leader in Corinth (Acts 18:12–17) who had been beaten during an attack on Paul, and later became a follower of Christ. Unfortunately, we don't know for sure. (Believe it or not, Sosthenes was a popular baby name at the time—not sure it



will make a comeback anytime soon.) Regardless, he was certainly known to the Corinthians, otherwise Paul would not have mentioned him by name.



Where does Paul say the church of God is located? Circle the city's name in your table from verse 2. If you have a bright colored marker, you might want to highlight and star your circled answer for emphasis. Where is this church of God located? *Sin City!* Oh friend, sometimes God does His most powerful work in the most unlikely of places.

I mean, would we believe today that revival could ever break out in Rio? The Las Vegas Strip? The Red Light District of Amsterdam? The Corinthian experience teaches us that the light of Jesus can shine in the darkest location, and there is no place on earth too immoral for a community belonging to God to be established. Can I get a “woo hoo!”?



Did you note the words Paul used to describe the church members in Corinth in verse 2? Record the two descriptive phrases below.

Does Paul refer to them as disappointments? Nope. Failures? No way. Hopeless mess-ups? Not even close. Clearly, the congregation *made* serious mistakes, but it didn't mean they *were* a mistake. Their issues did not define them; instead, their identity was based on their relationship with Christ. Paul started off his letter by describing them as sanctified—set apart for God—and called to be His holy people. Unbelievably, the Corinthian believers *were* holy in God's sight, regardless of their sinful living and bad behavior.

New Testament teacher Kenneth E. Bailey shares,

The Corinthians are identified as “Those who were made holy” and who were “called out as saints [i.e., holy ones].” They were getting drunk at Holy Communion and shouting insults at each other. One of them was sleeping with (a family member) . . . Others denied the resurrection. Yet Paul called them “saints.” Remarkable! Clearly, for Paul, a “saint” meant a person who had received the Holy Spirit and not a person who had reached some undefined stratospheric level of piety. The troublesome Corinthians *were saints!*”¹⁹

The Corinthian church members were called to be saints in their sin-soaked city. This blows me away! I’m not sure what image comes to mind when you hear the word *saint*—but if you are picturing nuns with halos orbiting their holy heads, it may be time for a fresh perspective. The New Testament uses the word *saint* or *saints* sixty-seven times. In every instance, the reference is to *all* believers. Never is the word used of a special group of believers who serve God better than others.²⁰ Instead, Scripture is clear that *all* Christians are called to be saints.

Apply It



If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you too have been sanctified—set apart for God and called to be holy. The truth is, in Christ, you *are* a saint! Just for fun, fill out the nametag below with “Saint” and then your first name. After writing it out, read it aloud. How does it feel to be a saint?



WELCOME TO SIN CITY



How might *knowing* this truth transform how you go about your daily routine?

Clearly, the congregation made serious mistakes, but it didn't mean they were a mistake.

I wish we could enjoy a warm beverage while we shared our thoughts together. How I'd love to hear your response. For sure, the call to live set apart and holy lives in our crazy, hurting world is not easy, yet thankfully we are not left to do so in our own power but in the power of the Holy Spirit. And in Christ, we have *all the power we need for all the challenges we face!*

Write someone a letter or short note this week reminding them of the truth of who they are. Pray and ask God who might need a fresh word of encouragement and write their name on the line below. Come back and put a smiley face by their name when the correspondence has actually been written, and delivered too.

Live Full Walk Free 

 *Video Lesson One:*

WELCOME TO SIN CITY

Use the space below to note anything that stands out to you from the video lesson. You may also choose to take notes on a separate sheet of paper.

WELCOME TO SIN CITY

Use the following questions as a guide for group discussion:

1. What stood out to you in today's video teaching? Any new insights?
2. Think about what you've learned about the city, people, and culture of ancient Corinth. In what ways is Corinth similar to our world today? In what ways is it different?
3. Cindy shared, "As Jesus girls, the key to living a bold life of fullness and freedom lies in seeing ourselves as God sees us." On a scale from 1 (simple) to 10 (hard), how easy is it for you to view yourself through "glasses of grace"? What would help you move up one notch?
4. The *Live Full, Walk Free* motto could be "Know the Truth. Live the Truth. Share the Truth." Of the three parts, which is easiest for you to incorporate into your everyday life? Which is the hardest? Explain.
5. Read 1 Corinthians 1:1–9 aloud. How might writing *sanctified*, *called*, *enriched*, and *blameless* on your fingers help you in the midst of your daily life this week?

