



loving church

1 CORINTHIANS 10 – 16

by Mark Dever and Carl Laferton

loving church
the good book guide to 1 Corinthians 10 – 16
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CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Why study 1 Corinthians 10 – 16?	5
1. Keep on running	7
1 Corinthians 9 v 24 – 10 v 13	
2. Love, liberty and legalism	13
1 Corinthians 10 v 14 – 11 v 1	
3. Loving authority	19
1 Corinthians 11 v 2-16	
4. Thoughtful unity	25
1 Corinthians 11 v 17-34	
5. Your gifts, their good	31
1 Corinthians 12 v 1-31a	
6. The most excellent way	37
1 Corinthians 12 v 31b – 14 v 40	
7. Resurrection: hold on	43
1 Corinthians 15	
8. Good examples	51
1 Corinthians 16	
Leader's Guide	56

introduction: good book guides

Every Bible-study group is different—yours may take place in a church building, in a home or in a cafe, on a train, over a leisurely mid-morning coffee or squashed into a 30-minute lunch break. Your group may include new Christians, mature Christians, non-Christians, moms and tots, students, businessmen or teens. That’s why we’ve designed these *Good Book Guides* to be flexible for use in many different situations.

Our aim in each session is to uncover the meaning of a passage, and see how it fits into the “big picture” of the Bible. But that can never be the end. We also need to appropriately apply what we have discovered to our lives. Let’s take a look at what is included:

- ↻ **Talkabout:** Most groups need to “break the ice” at the beginning of a session, and here’s the question that will do that. It’s designed to get people talking around a subject that will be covered in the course of the Bible study.
- ↓ **Investigate:** The Bible text for each session is broken up into manageable chunks, with questions that aim to help you understand what the passage is about. **The Leader’s Guide** contains **guidance on questions**, and sometimes ☑ additional “follow-up” questions.
- 🗨️ **Explore more (optional):** These questions will help you connect what you have learned to other parts of the Bible, so you can begin to fit it all together like a jig-saw; or occasionally look at a part of the passage that’s not dealt with in detail in the main study.
- ➡ **Apply:** As you go through a Bible study, you’ll keep coming across **apply** sections. These are questions to get the group discussing what the Bible teaching means in practice for you and your church. 🗨️ **Getting personal** is an opportunity for you to think, plan and pray about the changes that you personally may need to make as a result of what you have learned.
- ↑ **Pray:** We want to encourage prayer that is rooted in God’s word—in line with His concerns, purposes and promises. So each session ends with an opportunity to review the truths and challenges highlighted by the Bible study, and turn them into prayers of request and thanksgiving.

The **Leader’s Guide** and introduction provide historical background information, explanations of the Bible texts for each session, ideas for **optional extra** activities, and guidance on how best to help people uncover the truths of God’s word.



why study 1 Corinthians 10-16?

What can turn a struggling church around? What should we do when a church is compromised by selling out to the culture; or is riven by factional strife; or is dominated by me-first materialism; or is being undermined by uncertainty about the gospel itself? What should we do when we see glimpses of these things in our own lives?

“Be on your guard”, wrote one church planter and pastor to one of the most messed-up churches we could imagine. “Stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong.

“Do everything in love.”

So wrote the apostle Paul to the first-century Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 16 v 13-14). This was a congregation which seemed to have lost its way. People were disparaging marriage; denying the resurrection; dividing into factions. Its members were using their worldly wealth, leadership positions and God-given abilities to win praise and honor for themselves.

Paul did not give up on them. He did not grow angry with them. He did not lecture them about wasting his time and ignoring his teaching.

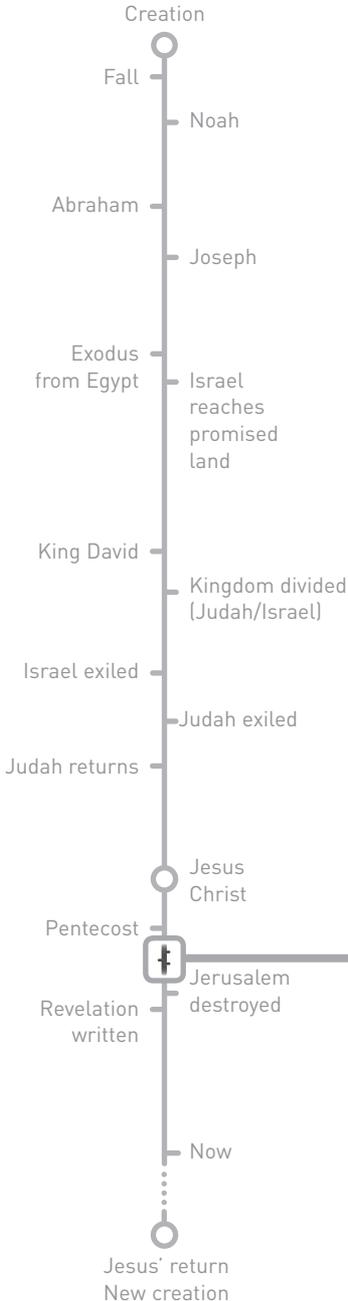
He encouraged them to *love their church*. And, in the second half of his first letter to them, he showed them *how* to love their church.

Christian love is no abstract theory. It is not a disembodied, unengaged cheerfulness. Christian love calls us not to desert but to stand guard, not to give up but to stand firm, not to avoid conflict in cowardice but to defend truth in courage. Christian love is Christ-like love.

This was the love that could turn the Corinthian church around and make it the church its members and its city needed it to be. And this is the love that all our local churches need. If we're to be part of a church that encourages its members; that engages with our culture; and that equips us to hold out the gospel—then we need to be a *loving* church.

These eight studies in 1 Corinthians 10 – 16 will enable, motivate and challenge you to love your church. They will show you how, as individuals and as a church, you can “do everything in love”. They will show you how to love as Christ did.





BIBLE TIMELINE

Where does 1 Corinthians fit into the whole story of God's word?

1 CORINTHIANS c55AD

49-50AD

Paul preaches in Corinth and sets up the church

51AD

Paul leaves Corinth

c55AD

Paul sends 1 Corinthians and then 2 Corinthians

1

1 Corinthians 9 v 24 – 10 v 13

KEEP ON RUNNING

talkabout

1. Imagine the starting line of a popular marathon. The starter's pistol goes, and the runners set off. Which of them are really marathon runners?

investigate

Read 1 Corinthians 9 v 24 – 10 v 4

Paul encourages these church members in Corinth to “run in such a way as to get the prize” (9 v 24)—“a crown that will last forever” (v 25). This is why he is writing to them. He wants these Christians to keep running in faith and obedience, so that they’ll make it to the finish line. And to underline his point, he points to an example in history.

DICTIONARY

Forefathers (10 v 1): in this context, the spiritual ancestors of Christians—ie: God’s people in the Old Testament.

Under the cloud (v 1): When God’s people were in the desert, God was present as a cloud, leading them (see Exodus 13 v 21).

Baptized into Moses (v 2): followed and trusted Moses as leader.

2. What period is he focusing on (10 v 1-4)?

- What advantages did these people have?



explore more

optional

➤ Read Exodus 14 v 21-31; 16 v 4-5, 13-18; 17 v 5-6

How do these passages help us appreciate how blessed these people were?

➤ Read 1 Corinthians 10 v 5-13

3. What is the shock in verse 5?

DICTIONARY

Idolaters (v 7):
people who love and serve a fake god (an idol).

Temptation (v 13):
a devil-prompted desire to disobey God.

- Why did this happen?



explore more

optional

➤ Read Exodus 17 v 1-3; 31 v 18 – 32 v 6; Numbers 25 v 1-2

How do these passages help us appreciate the seriousness of the people's disobedience?

What would these sins look like if they happened in your fellowship?

4. What does 1 Corinthians 10 v 1-10 tell us about God?



- And about following Him?

apply

5. Why did Paul include these verses in his letter (v 6, 11)?

6. In what ways do we excuse giving into temptation? How does verse 13 both encourage and challenge us?

getting personal

We can be confident that God will enable us to resist any and every temptation. We face the same temptations as everyone else; and we can outlast all of them, with God's help.

How are you being tempted to disobey God at the moment? When you give in, what excuses do you use? What truth do you need to remember to combat that excuse?

investigate

These Corinthians had started the Christian race—but the starting line and the finish line are not the same thing. In the first half of the letter, Paul outlined a series of ways in which they were being tempted to disobey God.



7. In pairs or on your own, pick out one or more of the areas in which this church was facing, or giving into, temptation:

- 1 v 11-12:

- 3 v 3:

- 4 v 18:

- 5 v 1-2:

- 6 v 6-7:

- 8 v 8-13:

8. **Read 4 v 10.** How does Paul describe this church's view of him, and of themselves?

- How does this match what you saw in Question Seven?

9. Why did this church need to hear verse 12?



- Why did they need to hear the warning of what happened to the Israelites in Moses' day?

apply

10. Why is complacency—unthinkingly assuming “you are standing firm”—such a danger to a church?

11. When it comes to obeying God, what are the greatest challenges your own fellowship faces?



getting personal

Churches cannot coast along in spiritual things. Regardless of what amazing things we might have seen God do in our congregation, we must continue to rely on Him daily.

Do you pray for your church to grow in godliness as well as in numbers?

Do you encourage other Christians not to be complacent and to keep challenging themselves?

Are there ways in which you need to be careful that you keep on running, and don't fall by the wayside?





pray

Thank God...

- that He lovingly warns His people.
- that He can see through complacency and hypocrisy.
- that He enables you to resist temptation so that you are able to obey Him.

Ask God...

- to help you to enjoy your blessings, but not to become complacent about your Christian life.
- to help you stand up to temptation (you might like to name a couple of areas in which you are struggling to do this at the moment).



Leader's Guide: 1 Corinthians 10 – 16

INTRODUCTION

Leading a Bible study can be a bit like herding cats—everyone has a different idea of what the passage could be about, and a different line of enquiry that they want to pursue. But a good group leader is more than someone who just referees this kind of discussion. You will want to:

- correctly understand and handle the Bible passage. But also...
- encourage and train the people in your group to do this for themselves. Don't fall into the trap of spoon-feeding people by simply passing on the information in the Leader's Guide. Then...
- make sure that no Bible study is finished without everyone knowing how the passage is relevant for them. What changes do you all need to make in light of the things you have been learning? And finally...
- encourage the group to turn all that has been learned and discussed into prayer.

Your Bible-study group is unique, and you are likely to know better than anyone the capabilities, backgrounds and circumstances of the people you are leading. That's why we've designed these guides with a number of optional features. If they're a quiet bunch, you might want to spend longer on talkabout. If your time is limited, you can choose to skip explore more, or get people to look at these questions at home. Can't get enough of Bible study? Well, some studies have optional extra homework projects. As leader, you can adapt and select the material to the needs of your particular group.

So what's in the Leader's Guide?

The main thing that this Leader's Guide will help you to do is to understand the major teaching points in the passage you are studying, and how to apply them. As well as guidance on the questions, the Leader's Guide for each session contains the following important sections:

THE BIG IDEA

One key sentence will give you the main point of the session. This is what you should be aiming to have fixed in people's minds as they leave the Bible study. And it's the point you need to head back toward when the discussion goes off on a tangent.

SUMMARY

An overview of the passage, including plenty of useful historical background information.

OPTIONAL EXTRA

Usually this is an introductory activity that ties in with the main theme of the Bible study, and is designed to "break the ice" at the beginning of a session. Or it may be a "homework project" that people can tackle during the week.

So let's take a look at the various different features of a Good Book Guide:

talkabout

Each session kicks off with a discussion question, based on the group's opinions or experiences. It's designed to get people talking and thinking in a general way about the main subject of the Bible study.

investigate

The first thing you and your group need to know is what the Bible passage is about, which is the purpose of these questions. But watch out—people may come up with answers based on their experiences or teaching they have heard in the past, without referring to the passage at all. It's amazing how often we can get through a Bible study without actually looking at the Bible! If you're stuck for an answer, the Leader's Guide contains guidance on questions. These are the answers to direct your group to. This information isn't meant to be read out to people—ideally, you want them to discover these answers from the Bible for themselves. Sometimes there are optional follow-up questions (see  in guidance on questions) to help you help your group get to the answer.

explore more

These questions generally point people to other relevant parts of the Bible. They are useful for helping your group to see how the passage fits into the “big picture” of the whole Bible. These sections are OPTIONAL—only use them if you have time. Remember that it's better to finish in good time having really grasped one big thing from the passage, than to try and cram everything in.

apply

We want to encourage you to spend more time working at application—too often, it is simply tacked on at the end. In the Good Book Guides, apply sections are mixed in with the investigate sections of the study. We hope that people will realize that application is not just an optional extra, but rather, the whole purpose of studying the

Bible. We do Bible study so that our lives can be changed by what we hear from God's word. If you skip the application, the Bible study hasn't achieved its purpose.

These questions draw out practical lessons that we can all learn from the Bible passage. You can review what has been learned so far, and think about practical differences that this should make in our churches and our lives. The group gets the opportunity to talk about what they personally have learned.

getting personal

These can be done at home, but it is well worth allowing a few moments of quiet reflection during the study for each person to think and pray about specific changes they need to make in their own lives.

Why not have a time for reporting back at the beginning of the following session, so that everyone can be encouraged and challenged by one another to make application a priority?

pray

In Acts 4 v 25-30 the first Christians quoted Psalm 2 as they prayed in response to the persecution of the apostles by the Jewish religious leaders. Today however, it's not as common for Christians to base prayers on the truths of God's word as it once was. As a result, our prayers tend to be weak, superficial and self-centered rather than bold, visionary and God-centered.

The prayer section is based on what has been learned from the Bible passage. How different our prayer times would be if we were genuinely responding to what God has said to us through His word.

1

1 Corinthians 9 v 24 – 10 v 14

KEEP ON RUNNING

THE BIG IDEA

God warns us that we need to keep going as His people by avoiding complacency about our sin.

SUMMARY

The church Paul had established in Corinth was young, full of life, and just as full of problems. At the time of Paul's letter, it was threatened with self-destruction. But its members did not realize this. Overconfidence in themselves and complacency about their relationship with God meant they needed to be warned about the reality of God's judgment of sin—judgment on those who call themselves His people as well as those who know they are not.

So, having encouraged the Corinthian Christians to keep running to get the prize of eternal life with God (9 v 24-25), Paul points them to an example to avoid: the Israelites in the time of the exodus and journey to the promised land (10 v 1-10). They had known great blessings from God and were well acquainted with His power. But even so they disobeyed God, and did not turn back to Him. And so they came under God's judgment—they died in the desert (v 5). They had crossed the starting line, but did not reach the finish line.

They are an example to the Corinthians (v 6, 11)—a warning of God's judgment on sin. Complacency—assuming we're standing firm—can easily lead to us falling (v 12). God will enable us to resist any temptation—no temptation is unendurable (v 13). So therefore, no giving in to temptation is excusable. We can, and must, obey God.

Since this is the first study in this Good Book Guide focusing on the second half of the letter, Q7 takes your group to a few verses outlining how the Corinthian church had fallen into a pattern of disobedience to how God wanted them to live. We need to take note of the examples both of Israel and of the Corinthian church, and learn not to make the same mistakes. Our churches cannot coast along in spiritual things. And, individually, whether or not we have been baptized, take communion, or see God's blessing in our lives, we need to continue humbly to obey God, and ensure we don't become complacent and slip into unnoticed, unrepentant sin. We have crossed the starting line—we need to keep running in order to reach the finish line and receive the "crown that will last forever" (9 v 25).

OPTIONAL EXTRA

Before the study, get your group to read 1 Corinthians 1 v 1 – 9 v 23. Ask them to pick out truths about God the Father and God the Son, and to come up with a one-sentence description of the church in Corinth that Paul was writing to.

GUIDANCE TO QUESTIONS

1. Imagine the starting line of a popular marathon. The starter's pistol goes, and the runners set off. Which of them are really marathon runners? In one sense, all of them. In another, possibly none of them—or at least, we can't know! All runners in a marathon are marathon runners—unless they don't finish. Then, they were in fact never marathon runners, because they didn't run a marathon. It's only

once someone finishes a marathon that we know they were marathon runners all along. The starting line and the finish line are not the same thing! Allow your group to discuss and disagree with one another! You could refer back to this question after Q7 and ask: What things threaten the Corinthian Christians so that they no longer keep running the Christian race?

2. What period is [Paul] focusing on

(10 v 1-4)? The time when the Israelites were rescued from Egypt by God, who then parted the Red Sea for them to escape through (Exodus 13 v 17 – 14 v 31) and led them through the desert toward the promised land.

• **What advantages did these people have (v 1-4)?** **Note:** If your group is unfamiliar with the events of the exodus, use the Explore More section below before answering this question.

- “Under the cloud and passed through the sea”—they were led by God through the Red Sea.
- “Baptized into Moses” (v 2)—they were members of the people who were under the leadership of Moses, God’s chosen leader. His deliverance was their deliverance—what he achieved, they achieved.
- They ate “spiritual food” and “drank spiritual drink”—God gave them miraculous food and water.
- The rock they drank from “was Christ” (v 4)—the rock from which the Israelites drank physical water symbolized Christ. Paul seems to mean that the Son of God was spiritually sustaining them.



• **Read Exodus 17 v 5-6. What does Paul say was happening spiritually as**

they were given physical food and drink by God? They were feeding on Christ. As people who trusted in God’s promises, they were sustained spiritually by their dependance on the Christ who God had promised would come.

EXPLORE MORE

Read Exodus 14 v 21-31; 16 v 4-5, 13-18; 17 v 5-6. How do these passages help us appreciate how blessed these people were? God was working powerfully and miraculously on their behalf, day by day. They had received so much from God—rescue, food, water—without which they would have died, and which they had no hope of providing for themselves.

3. What is the shock in [1 Cor 10] verse 5?

“Their bodies were scattered all over the desert”. Numbers 13 – 14 give the background to this statement—it is worth reading beforehand and summarizing to your group. Even after all that blessing, God killed some of them. Despite an amazing start to their life as God’s people, many of them did not continue as God’s people.

• **Why did this happen (v 6-10)?**

- v 6: they set their hearts on evil.
- v 7: they were “idolators”, copying the religious practices of “pagan” (ie: non-God-knowing) nations around them.
- v 8: they committed sexual immorality
- v 9: they tested the Lord, to see if He really cared.
- v 10: they grumbled against God, suggesting He didn’t know what He was doing, or would not get them to the land He’d promised them.

EXPLORE MORE

Read Exodus 31 v 18 – 32 v 6; Numbers 25 v 1-2; 17 v 1-3. How do

these passages help us appreciate the seriousness of the people's disobedience?

In Exodus 32, Israel is at the foot of Mount Sinai, as Moses is given the law by God, which will teach them how to live in the land He's bringing them to. And they spend their time making a god who they then pretend rescued them from Egypt! In Numbers 25, the men leave their wives to commit sexual immorality with women from a different nation, and end up worshipping their gods—all in direct disobedience to God (see Exodus 34 v 15-16). And in Exodus 17, we see them, having just been rescued from slavery, passed through the Red Sea, and eaten food given miraculously, suggesting that God isn't looking after them, and slavery and genocide in Egypt would have been a better option than being part of God's people.

What would these sins look like if they happened in your church fellowship?

4. What does 1 Corinthians 10 v 1-10 tell us about God?

- He is a God of mighty acts, and He uses His might to rescue people.
- He sustains His people, physically and spiritually.
- He works through His chosen leader to deliver His people.
- He is not pleased with people who are disobedient, untrusting, or selfish ie: sinful.
- He punishes people for unrepentant sin—even if they have called themselves His own people.
- He considers idolatry, sexual immorality, untrusting "testing", and grumbling to be sinful.
- **And about following Him?** We need to trust God, keep trusting God, and obey and be guided by Him. We must not think that, because we have been

baptized, or once professed faith, or receive Communion, or have known great blessing from God, that we can persist in disobedient sin.

5. APPLY: Why did Paul include these verses in his letter (v 6, 11)?

As examples to teach us not to set our "hearts on evil things" (v 6). The Old Testament was pointing forwards to Christ, who is its fulfillment (v 11)—but God deals with His people in the same way today as He did then. We should learn from the sad example of these people, who fell from the faith. We should avoid their fate by avoiding their sins, or by turning back to God as our ruler and forgiver if ever we commit them.

6. APPLY: In what ways do we excuse giving into temptation?

Our excuses vary depending on the temptation and our characters—allow your group to discuss this question. Some possibilities:

- It's not really a sin, so it doesn't matter.
- It is a sin, but only a small one—not a big one like murder or adultery.
- I just couldn't resist.
- There was no way out. I had no choice.
- You don't know what I face. Anyone in my position would give in.

How does verse 13 encourage and challenge us?

The *encouragement* is that God will enable us to resist any temptation. We only face things that tempt other people too—and though we will not be able to avoid temptation, by God's grace we will never face a temptation that is unendurable. He will always make us able to obey Him. In thinking about the *challenge*, you could take each excuse your group has come up with, and find the answer to that excuse in these verses. For those above:

- God defines what sin is. We're not at liberty to redefine it (v 6-10).

- There is no small sin. God punishes it (v 5).
- We can always resist—God never allows us to be tempted unendurably (v 13).
- God always provides a way out. There is always an option which does not involve sinning (v 13).
- We don't face a temptation that no one else has faced (v 13).

7. In pairs or on your own, pick out the areas in which this church was facing, or giving into, temptation.

- 1 v 11-12: Being divisive and argumentative; following and being loyal to a minister, rather than to Christ.
- 3 v 3: Being envious of other Christians.
- 4 v 18: Being arrogant, assuming they knew better than an apostle such as Paul.
- 5 v 1-2: Sexual immorality (eg: sleeping with close relations)—and pride about tolerating and accepting this behavior.
- 6 v 6-7: Suing one another in court.
- 8 v 8-13: (This one is tricky!) Doing things that Christians are free to do without thinking about the impact this has on the faith of other Christians who may think it's wrong, and so be encouraged to do something they believe to be sinful.

8. Read 4 v 10. How does Paul describe this church's view of him, and of themselves?

The Corinthian church saw Paul as a fool, weak, and dishonored. They, on the other hand, were (they thought) wise, strong and honored.

- **How does this match what you saw in Q7?** The Corinthian church was certainly not wise or strong, and deserved no honor! They were backbiting and selfish, proud and complacent, and praising of sinful behavior. The reality God saw in this church was very different from how they liked to see themselves.

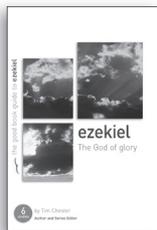
9. Why did this church need to hear verse 12? Because they were overconfident. They thought they were standing firm, and so were not noticing or dealing with the disobedience that had spread through so many areas of their church's life. And so they were in danger of "falling"—of coming under God's judgment instead of enjoying His blessing and salvation.

- **Why did they need to hear the warning of what happened to the Israelites in Moses' day?** Because being church members, calling themselves Christians, receiving baptism and taking communion provide no final security against God's judgment for a life lived in unrepentant licentiousness. The Israelites had considered themselves God's people, but had fallen under punishment for their sin—this church needed to take care they did not face the same end.

10. APPLY: Why is complacency—thinking "you are standing firm"—such a danger to a church? Complacency can very easily lead (as it had in Corinth) to sinful behaviour, and therefore to a "fall"—to not finishing the Christian race, and missing out on the crown that will last eternally (9 v 25). And if a church is complacent, it won't notice a slow, steady decline into disobedience, until it is too late. The time we are most likely to "fall" is when we assume we are "standing firm".

11. APPLY: What are the greatest challenges your church faces when it comes to obeying God? Encourage your group to include themselves in this discussion (we often find it easier to notice how others are not obeying God). You might like to use the answers to Q3 and Q7 as a basis for your discussion.

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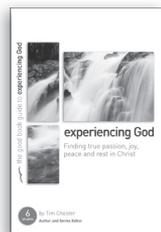
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