

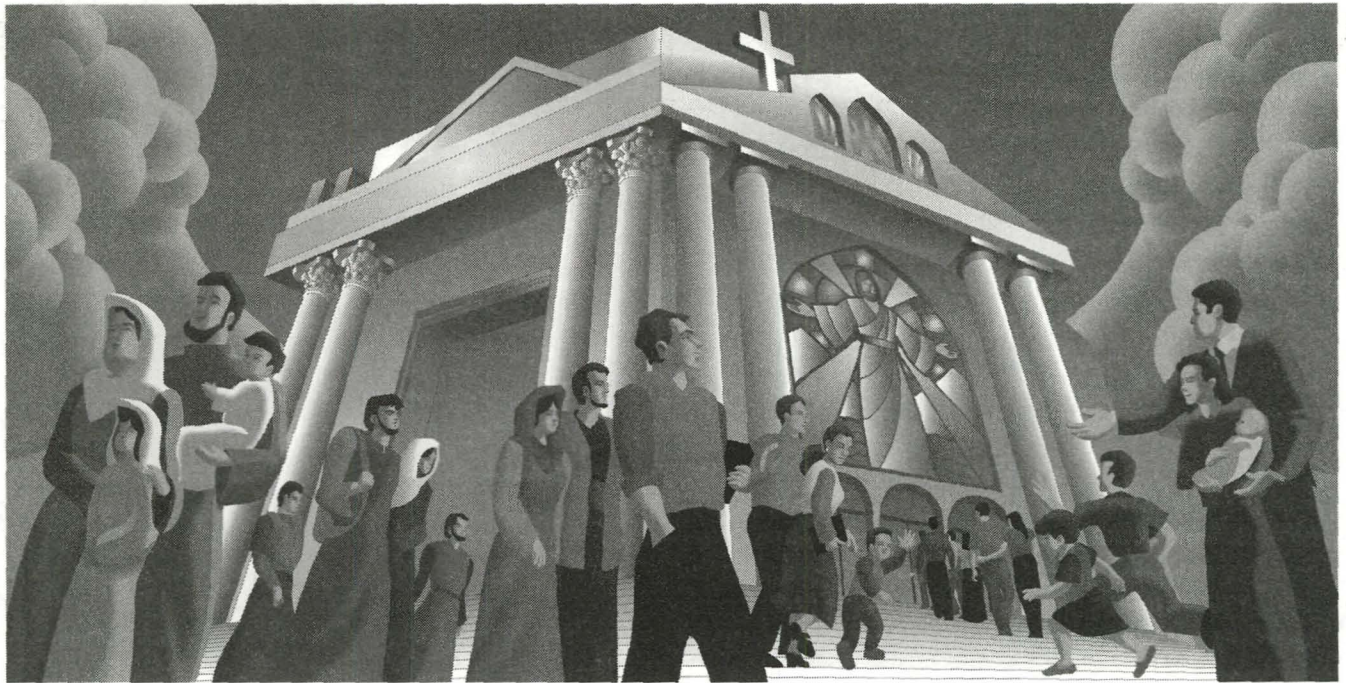
LifeLight

"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." John 1:4

1 Corinthians



LEADERS GUIDE



Pagan temples. Greek philosophy. A fractious, party spirit. These and other issues confronted Christ's Church in the city of Corinth. When Paul heard about their difficulties, he sent them his first Spirit-inspired Pastoral Letter. Luther wrote, "In this epistle St. Paul exhorts the Corinthians to be one in faith and love, and to see to it that they learn well the chief thing, namely, that Christ is our salvation, the thing over which all reason and wisdom stumbles" (AE 35:380).

Depicted visually by people departing a pagan temple, leaving our former way of life is difficult. But Christ, through His cross and empty tomb, has set us free to be God's people. His Spirit "calls, gathers, and enlightens us" through the Gospel. Illustrated by the contemporary church building, we come together to be nourished by our Lord's own flesh and blood. In His Supper we are not merely individuals with separate agendas but are truly "one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Corinthians 10:17).



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Introduction

Welcome to LifeLight

A special pleasure is in store for you. You will be instrumental in leading your brothers and sisters in Christ closer to Him who is our life and light (John 1:4). You will have the pleasure of seeing fellow Christians discover new insights and rediscover old ones as they open the Scriptures and dig deep into them, perhaps deeper than they have ever dug before. More than that, you will have the pleasure of sharing in this wonderful study.

LifeLight—An In-depth Study

LifeLight is a series of in-depth Bible studies. The goal of LifeLight is that through a regular program of in-depth personal and group study of Scripture, more and more Christian adults may grow in their personal faith in Jesus Christ, enjoy fellowship with the members of His body, and reach out in love to others in witness and service.

In-depth means that this Bible study includes the following four components: individual daily home study; discussion in a small group; a lecture presentation on the Scripture portion under study; and an enhancement of the week's material (through reading the enrichment magazine).

LifeLight Participants

LifeLight participants are adults who desire a deeper study of the Scriptures than is available in the typical Sunday morning adult Bible class. (Mid-to-older teens might also be LifeLight participants.) While LifeLight does not assume an existing knowledge of the Bible or special experience or skills in Bible study, it does assume a level of commitment that will bring participants to each of the nine weekly assemblies having read the assigned readings and attempted to answer the study questions. Daily reading and study will require from 15 to 30 minutes for the five days preceding the LifeLight assembly. The day following the assembly will be spent reviewing the previous week's study by going over the completed study leaflet and the enrichment magazine.

LifeLight Leadership

While the in-depth process used by LifeLight begins with individual study and cannot achieve its aims without this individual effort, it cannot be completed by individual study alone. Therefore, trained leaders are necessary. You fill one or perhaps more of the important roles described below.

The Director

This person oversees the LifeLight program in a local center (which may be a congregation or a center operated by several neighboring congregations). The director

- serves as the parish LifeLight overall coordinator and leader;
- coordinates the scheduling of the LifeLight program;
- orders materials;
- convenes LifeLight leadership-team meetings;
- develops publicity materials;
- recruits participants;
- maintains records and budgeting;
- assigns, with the leadership-team, participants to small discussion groups;
- makes arrangements for facilities;
- communicates outreach opportunities to small-group leaders and to congregational boards;
- follows up on participants who leave the program.

The Assistant Director (*optional*)

This person may assist the director. Duties listed for the director may be assigned to the assistant director as mutually agreeable.

The Lecture Leader

This person prepares and delivers the lecture at the weekly assembly. (**Lesson material for the lecture leader begins on p. 7.**) The lecture leader

- prepares and presents the Bible study lecture to the large group;
- prepares worship activities (devotional thought,

hymn, prayer), using resources in the study leaflet and leaders guide and possibly other outside sources;

- helps the small-group discussion leaders to grow in understanding the content of the lessons;
- encourages prayer at weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders meetings.

The Small-Group Coordinator (*optional; the director may fill this role*)

This person supervises and coordinates the work of the small-group discussion leaders. The small-group coordinator

- recruits with the leadership-team the small-group discussion leaders;
- trains or arranges for training of the discussion leaders;
- assists the director and discussion leaders in follow-up and outreach;
- encourages the discussion leaders to contact absent group members;
- participates in the weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders equipping meetings;
- provides ongoing training and support as needed.

The Small-Group Discussion Leaders

These people guide and facilitate discussion of LifeLight participants in the small groups. (**Lesson material for the small-group leaders begins on p. 53.**) There should be one discussion leader for every group of no more than twelve participants. The small-group discussion leaders are, perhaps, those individuals who are most important to the success of the program. They should, therefore, be chosen with special care and be equipped with skills needed to guide discussion and to foster a caring fellowship within the group. These discussion leaders

- prepare each week for the small-group discussion by using the study leaflet and small-group leaders guide section for that session (see p. 54);
- read the enrichment magazine as a study supplement;
- guide and facilitate discussion in their small group;
- encourage and assist the discussion group in prayer;
- foster fellowship and mutual care within the discussion group;
- attend weekly discussion-leaders training meetings.

Leadership Training

LifeLight leaders will meet weekly to review the previous week's work and plan the coming week. At this session, leaders can address concerns and prepare for the coming session. LifeLight is a 1½-hour program with no possibility for it to be taught in the one hour typically available on Sunday mornings. Some congregations, however, may want to use the Sunday morning Bible study hour for LifeLight preparation and leadership training. In such a meeting, the lecture leader and/or small-group coordinator may lead the discussion leaders through the coming week's lesson, reserving 5 or 10 minutes for problem solving or other group concerns.

While it requires intense effort, LifeLight has proven to bring great benefit to LifeLight participants. The effort put into this program, both by leaders and by participants, will be rewarding and profitable.

The LifeLight Weekly Schedule

Here is how LifeLight will work week by week:

1. Before session 1, each participant will receive the study leaflet for session 1 and the enrichment magazine for the course. The study leaflet contains worship resources (for use both in individual daily study and at the opening of the following week's assembly) and readings and study questions for five days. Challenge questions will lead those participants who have the time and desire a greater challenge into even deeper levels of study.
2. After the five days of individual study at home, participants will gather for a weekly assembly of all LifeLight participants. The assembly will begin with a brief period of worship (5 minutes). Participants will then join their assigned small discussion groups (of twelve or fewer, who will remain the same throughout the course), where they will go over the week's study questions together (55 minutes). Assembling together once again, participants will listen to a lecture presentation on the readings they have studied in the previous week and discussed in their small groups (20 minutes). After the lecture presentation, the director or another leader will distribute the study leaflet for the following week. Closing announcements and other necessary business may take another five minutes before dismissal.

In some places some small groups will not join the

weekly assembly because of scheduling or other reasons. Such groups may meet at another time and place (perhaps in the home of one of the small group's members). Those congregations may record the lecture given by the lecture leader at the weekly assembly and duplicate it for use by other groups meeting later in the week.

3. On the day following the assembly, participants will review the preceding week's work by rereading the study leaflet they completed (and that they perhaps supplemented or corrected during the discussion in their small group) and by reading appropriate articles in the enrichment magazine.

Then the LifeLight weekly study process will begin all over again!

Recommended Study Resources

Concordia Self-Study Bible, New International Version. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986. Interpretive notes on each page form a running commentary on the text. The book includes cross-references, a 35,000-word concordance, full-color maps, charts, and timelines.

The Holy Bible, English Standard Version: Concordia Edition. St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House for Crossway Bibles, 2001, 2003. An accurate and precise word-for-word translation where each word and phrase is carefully weighed against the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek to ensure the fullest accuracy and clarity.

Roehrs, Walter R., and Martin H. Franzmann. *Concordia Self-Study Commentary.* St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979. This one-volume commentary on the Bible is tailored for lay use.

Every Voice a Song: Pipe Organ Accompaniment for 180 Hymns and Liturgy. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House (order no. 99-1565). Use this music CD for worship hymn accompaniment.

Forgiveness and Power for Improvement

1 Corinthians 1–2

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

Although all Christians are imperfect, God—through the Gospel—forgives our sins and improves our lives.

Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit working through the Word, will

1. rely more fully on God's grace in Christ, who alone grants forgiveness for their imperfection;
2. grow in the confidence that through the work of Christ and the Spirit, God is conforming them to the image of His Son; and
3. use the opportunities that God places before them to live by God's grace and power.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 54.

For the Lecture Leader

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *Every Voice a Song*, a nine-CD set of organ accompaniments for 180 hymns and liturgy. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on p. 6.) Follow with the devotion.

Devotion

(1 Corinthians 1:18) "For the word of the cross is folly

to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

Perishing is a difficult word for believers and unbelievers alike. The longer we live, the more aware we become that everything we see and know changes. What is now new will one day be old.

We can gaze in awe at a giant, two-thousand-year-old redwood tree or warm our face in daily sunshine, believing each will be there tomorrow. But even in nature, nothing lasts forever. Our lives are forever changing. The things around us are forever perishing.

Our Father in heaven understands the desperation change can bring. We want—we need, really—to hold on to something, to have a sense of purpose and permanence in our lives, to love and to be loved forever. That is why our heavenly Father gave us His beloved Son.

To unbelievers, the cross of Jesus is meaningless, decaying wood, foolishness. But in the cross, believers see God's power, His gift of eternal life. We will one day leave this temporary world. But because of Jesus' death we will be ushered into an eternal life of joy, a place where we will never hear the word *perish* again.

Heavenly Father, thank You for offering Your Son for this sinful world so that I may have a permanent home in heaven with You. Amen.

Lecture Presentation

Introduction

If you read no further than verse 9 in chapter 1, you might get the impression that these Christians at Corinth were just about perfect. But the fact is that, like us, they were very imperfect. Paul knew them well, better even than they knew themselves. In Acts 18:1–17, we read about Paul's eighteen-month ministry among them. This was much longer than he ordinarily remained with a new church. It gave him the opportunity to get to know them rather intimately.

Paul's experience at Corinth had been very similar to what he encountered elsewhere in his missionary work. There had been the usual conflict with the Jews, and then, when they rejected the Gospel, Paul directed his ministry to the Gentiles. Many Gentiles in Corinth were

receptive and made excellent progress in Christian faith and in sharing that faith, talking about it with one another and with those outside the Church. However, these believers had not completely shed the evil influences of the corrupt world in which they lived. In fact, reports of serious imperfections among them prompted Paul to write this letter.

There were divisions in the congregation, as well as an ugly case of sexual immorality. Members were suing one another. Some of their marriages were in trouble. Their understanding and practice of the Lord's Supper was distorted. They were confused and uncertain about the resurrection of the body and the life to come. Complicating the situation was a bad attitude. They appeared to have become intellectually and spiritually arrogant. They were very sure that they had all the answers and that they were superior Christians. They were unconcerned about the appalling developments that Paul addresses in this letter.

It's no surprise that the Corinthians were so imperfect. They were new Christians who had come out of a morally bankrupt, pagan environment. Corinth was a large seaport (650,000 inhabitants), a center of transportation and commerce and notorious for its open immorality, including extensive temple prostitution. Although not a major intellectual or academic center, Corinth was permeated with Greek philosophy and its high regard for "wisdom." Those who were religious tended to participate in the worship of one or more of the pagan gods. It is clear from Paul's comments in this letter that these evil influences and others like them were taking their toll on the Corinthian Christians.

1 Beginning with Positives (1:1)

Although this letter will address things that have gone seriously wrong among his readers, Paul begins with what is right among them and about them. In due time, he will tackle the problems in a candid and straightforward manner. But there is more to these and to all other Christians than their imperfections.

God has done some wonderful things for them and in them, and the best is yet to come. So this is where the apostle begins. Paul isn't simply trying to soften the blow that he will deliver when he discusses their sins. Rather, he wants to let them know that whatever is wrong with and in them is forgiven in Christ and that God will change what needs to be changed. His reason for confronting them with their shortcomings is not to

humiliate or demean them but to help them rely on God's grace for forgiveness and not on their own strength to improve. This help is found in something—someone—whom they already know and trust: Jesus Christ, whose cross is both the source of salvation and the power for improvement.

Years ago, popular songwriter Johnny Mercer published a hit titled "You've Got to Accentuate the Positive." The next phrase added the advice to "eliminate the negative." As Christians, there is a sense in which we can do this. With God's generous gift of forgiveness in Christ, we can confess our sins, the negative, and emphasize the positive, God's improving our lives through the Gospel. Too often we find ourselves so preoccupied with our failures and weaknesses that we ignore our new life. This thinking runs along these lines: "Since we're going to fall short of perfection anyway, why even try?" Not many would ever become champion athletes if they approached their sport with that attitude.

Although perfection is not possible for the Christian in this life, improvement is possible by His grace, and we ought to get excited about that! We ought to make the most of how God enables us to live by faith.

2 Grace for Improvement (1:2–12)

After identifying himself in the style of ancient correspondents and referring briefly to his apostolic office and authority, Paul turns to the Corinthians themselves. He begins by saying in effect, "You people really have a lot going for you. Christ Jesus has forgiven all your sins, and He is going to help you to do better. This is the marvelous, undeserved gift of God to all Christians, made possible by the suffering and sacrifice of Christ. We are not dogged by our past sins; they are pardoned! We are not helpless in the face of future temptations; we are enabled to resist them and to live according to God's Word!"

Paul celebrates God's grace. (V. 4) "I give thanks to my God for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus." Then Paul describes some specifics about how God has shown His grace to the believers in Corinth. Everything he says about them and their congregation is also true of us. He explains that God has given some people in the congregation unique abilities to understand Jesus and His work and to communicate this to them. What Paul began when he preached the Gospel to them has been continued by other gifted teachers and witnesses in their midst. Because the

Gospel is proclaimed among them, they have everything they need to continue strong in their faith and to keep improving in their Christian lives. For the Corinthians, as for us, that improvement will never be complete in this life. But with all of their remaining sins covered by His mercy, they (and we too) will stand blameless before our Judge when Christ returns (vv. 5–9).

One kind of improvement Paul especially wanted to encourage had to do with interpersonal relationships in the church. The congregation had split into several factions (covered in the next lesson). In the name of the Lord Jesus, Paul calls for improvement. That means, because of what Jesus has done for them, because of what this means to them, because Jesus wants them to improve in this way, and because He enables them to improve, Paul is confident that God will make these changes in them.

And what—exactly—are those changes? (V. 10) “That all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.” In other words, “God can heal these divisions so that you get along with one another much better. You all belong to Christ through His saving death for you on the cross. Because you belong to Him, you also belong to one another. His influence enables you to think and feel and act toward one another as He thinks and feels and acts toward you. You can experience a much greater level of unity. Christ has already given you that unity, by His grace.”

All Christian congregations have room for improvement in this area, even those without a lot of conflict and disagreement. And in Christ, all have the ability to grow even closer to one another, more appreciative and understanding of one another, more ready to agree and cooperate with one another. Just imagine what your congregation would be like if all, or even some of you, would, with God’s help, get along better with one another than you are doing now!

3 Christ Is the Potential (1:13–25)

But is this expecting too much? Can the simple message of pardon and eternal life through Jesus and His cross actually solve the greatest of all human problems and change the attitudes and actions of perverse human beings? Many in both the pagan and Jewish communities were skeptical and even scornful. Some of this attitude had rubbed off on the Corinthian Christians. It all

seemed too simple and unsophisticated.

Even so, Paul did little or nothing to present the message of the cross in an impressive way. In fact, he deliberately avoided oratory and philosophy. Miracles rarely accompanied his ministry in Corinth. This disappointed some, especially the Jews. If he had performed some acts of healing, for example, maybe then they could have taken his simple message more seriously. But he hadn’t and they didn’t.

Instead, Paul insists (vv. 13–24) that this simple message of a dying Savior is an incomparable source of divine power and wisdom. It is only through this Gospel that we can know God and belong to Him in a saving relationship. It is only through this Gospel that we can experience His transforming influence in our lives.

From time immemorial, philosophers and others considered wise by the world have tried to figure God out and show people how to relate to Him and please Him. But the best of them have failed. God has not and cannot be known through the exercise of the human mind or by any other human effort. Only as He has taken the initiative, only as He has disclosed Himself can we know Him. That disclosure came in His incarnate Son, who in love gave Himself for our sins. To know God, as Martin Luther said, we must look into the face of that despised and suffering man, Jesus Christ. There and there alone can we find out what God is really like, how He feels about us, and what He can do for us (vv. 18–24). (V. 25) “For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

4 God’s Style—Doing the Impressive through the Unimpressive (1:26–2:5)

In verses 26–31, Paul points out that God’s style is to do big things through little things and powerful things through weakness. That is evident not only in what happened to Christ but also in what happens to Christians. You Corinthians yourselves are proof of this, Paul contends. Few of you are powerful, brilliant, or aristocratic, but God has chosen to do great things in and through you. God chose to reveal Himself not to the prominent and educated people of Corinth but to these ordinary Christians. What the smart ones of the world will never be able to figure out, these unimpressive Corinthians know clearly and can communicate effectively. God has chosen to give them this amazing and saving knowledge, even though they do not possess great minds or

great learning or great status. God likes to do important and impressive things through those who, of themselves, have no cause to boast.

Not only the Corinthians but Paul himself is an example of this, according to 2:1–5. He recalls for their benefit how unimpressive he was as a speaker and how little personal confidence he had when he presented Jesus Christ to them. He did not try to dazzle them with learning and eloquence. There was nothing fancy about him or his way of saying things. He simply told them that someone cared for them more than they could imagine, loved them more than they even loved themselves, and cared enough to die a terrible death for them so that their sins could be forgiven and they could belong to God forever. His name is Jesus, and He is the Savior God had been promising to His people for centuries.

This is the meaning of Paul's statement, (v. 2) "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." Not a fancy preacher or a fancy message, but powerful just the same—powerful enough to bring them to saving faith and powerful enough to enable them to improve in their Christian lives—not human power located in Paul, the preacher, but the power of the Holy Spirit, located in that unimpressive, unsophisticated message of the cross.

When Paul says that He spoke to them of nothing but Jesus and Him crucified, he does not mean that he would discuss no other topic than the events of that first Good Friday. In this letter and elsewhere, he addresses many areas of Christian doctrine. But his point is that no matter what other doctrine he may be explaining, he always does it in the light of the Gospel of the cross. That Gospel permeates every other doctrine of the faith, and no doctrine is adequately presented or understood unless the Gospel shines through it.

5 Secret Wisdom Revealed by the Spirit (2:6–16)

The message of the cross is the message of God's love and all that it does for us. Some things about God are quite evident from the world around us—that He is very intelligent and creative, for example, and that He has great power. As we notice and reflect on this planet and all that is in it, the amazing creatures and systems, we can hardly come to any other conclusion. However, apart from Christ there is no way of knowing that the Creator and Controller of our world loves us as much as He does and forgives our sins. That is hidden, secret, a

mystery until and unless somehow we see Him giving Himself for us on Calvary. And even that great demonstration of God's love can register only as the Holy Spirit illuminates our minds and impresses it upon our hearts through the Gospel. The Holy Spirit is God Himself reaching out to us in person, not only informing us of His love in Christ, but touching and embracing us with that love: (vv. 9–10) "No eye has seen, nor ear has heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him"—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit."

The Holy Spirit knows the full depth and strength of the heavenly Father's love for us, not only because He, too, is God, but also because He plumbs the Father's heart and mind. He brings to us in the Gospel all the warmth and wonder of the Father's loving heart. So that we might receive this Gospel in its purest and most authentic form, the Spirit inspired the words of the prophets, apostles, and evangelists in the Scriptures. Because He wants all who hear the Gospel to receive and believe it, the Holy Spirit accompanies the message and works on the hearers through the message. The Spirit enables those who proclaim and teach it to do so. Without the Spirit's activity in both the preacher and the listener, the Gospel seems like nonsense (vv. 10b–16).

Conclusion

Imperfect Christians have an amazing potential for improvement, and that potential is a gift from God, worked through the Gospel. This is something to focus on very seriously and intently, to celebrate gratefully and enthusiastically, and to put into practice very deliberately. In the lessons to come, we will look at some specific areas where imperfection is most evident and where improvement is necessary. But for now, remember who God has already made you in Christ Jesus. Focus on the righteousness that is yours in Christ. Then meditate on the marvelous gifts God has given you through His grace for your Christian walk.

Concluding Activities

Speak a brief prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as participants prepare the coming lessons. Then make any necessary announcements and distribute study leaflet 2.

What to Think about Your Pastor

1 Corinthians 3–4

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

As servants of Christ through whom people come to faith and grow in faith, pastors are to be appreciated and respected, but they are not to be made the center of Christian loyalty.

Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit working through the Word, will

1. more clearly understand the office and authority of their pastors;
2. respond to their ministries more gratefully and respectfully; and
3. resist the temptation to ignore, despise, or idolize them.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 57.

For the Lecture Leader

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* and *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *Every Voice a Song*, a nine-CD set of organ accompaniments for 180 hymns and liturgy. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on p. 6.) Follow with the devotion.

Devotion

(1 Corinthians 4:5) "Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will discuss the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his condemnation from God."

The daily weather forecaster told of a solar eclipse. During the eclipse, observers would notice the filtered sun and the strangeness of shadows.

How exciting to witness firsthand the powerful effect of our small moon as it passes in front of the gigantic sun! But how frightening to think of the devastation that would occur should the sun's light be interrupted indefinitely! Without the sun, all living things would die.

A solar eclipse parallels our own life and relationship with God. Without Christ's light in our lives, we would be doomed to eternal destruction. But we are not without Him! His light shines brilliantly, but now because of our sin, only "filtered rays" touch us. Just as the passing of an eclipse reveals the full glory of the sun, so Jesus' return will one day reveal the pure light Christ has ignited in our hearts. Then nothing will be hidden; all things will be revealed.

Jesus has shattered the darkness of sin and death by giving Himself up for us on the cross, and He will come again to bring a light that will shine forever in human hearts. Where there is now sadness, there will be joy. Where there is now death, there will be life.

Come, Lord Jesus, and shine Your true light over all the world—and especially in me. Amen.

Lecture Presentation

Introduction

Almost everyone agrees that the role of pastors is becoming increasingly difficult. Some seem to feel that it is their right to criticize their pastors without restraint. Pastors sometimes feel defeated and demoralized as they struggle to meet expectations, which seem unrealistic and unfair. Authorities on pastoral ministry are now speaking of the "battered pastor syndrome," a condition in which pastors are in great distress, even on the point of collapse, under the impact of members' hostile

attitudes and actions. One such expert states that at least one pastor in five is suffering from this condition.

The “battered pastor syndrome” is not a new problem. St. Paul himself suffered from the attacks of the very people whom he had led to the Lord. This was especially the case with the Corinthian Christians. Despite his long (for him) and faithful ministry among them, some in the congregation were ready to reject his ministry as inadequate. They favored other spiritual leaders whom they regarded as more impressive, more attractive. These believers listened to and repeated disparaging remarks about Paul. They felt that they had already received the benefit of everything he had to offer, and so they looked to others for direction. Thus, as Paul writes this letter, he carefully explains how God expects us to think of our pastors and how we ought to treat them. The epistle balances two points:

1. We respect and appreciate pastors as God’s instruments in bringing us to faith and helping us grow in faith.
2. Our ultimate loyalty belongs to Christ Jesus; we are not to center our loyalty on any human leader.

Most of what Paul says here relates to his ministry as an apostle. Apostles and pastors share in the one, divinely instituted Office of the Ministry (Ephesians 4:11–14). Apostles were missionaries sent out by Christ to preach the Gospel to those who did not already know Him. A pastor is sent by Christ to minister to people who have already come to faith to nurture and guide them spiritually. Of course, pastors also work to win the lost, and missionaries often work to strengthen new believers. For instance, Paul came to the Corinthians as a missionary with the purpose of converting them, and he remained among them for a time to serve them as their pastor, to build them up in their new faith and life.

1 Factions in the Congregation (1:10–17)

Paul begins his discussion by referring back to the problem he had already mentioned in 1:10–17. Members of the congregation had gathered around their favorite spiritual leaders, and each group arrogantly claimed superiority over the others. They had split the congregation into rival factions over these misguided loyalties:

(1:12) One of you says, “I follow Paul,” or “I follow Apollos,” or “I follow Cephas,” or “I follow Christ.”

The first group felt they should stick with Paul as the one who, after all, first brought them the Gospel. The

second group favored Apollos, possibly because he was more eloquent and more of an intellectual than Paul. The third group liked Peter (referred to by his other name, Cephas), perhaps because he had been the leader of Jesus’ twelve disciples and represented the great mother church in Jerusalem. The fourth group apparently saw an opportunity to put themselves ahead of the others by claiming Christ as their leader. But it seems evident that they were putting our Lord in the same category with other human leaders—Paul, Apollos, and Peter.

Focus on Christ, Paul says. He is the only one who died for you, and He wants to hold you all together. He is not divided, and He does not want His people to be divided. Don’t gather together around the one who baptized you, but center your life on Jesus, into whom you were baptized. Your highest loyalty belongs not to the ones who preached to you and taught you, but to the one Lord whom they proclaimed.

2 Immature and Worldly Attitudes toward Pastors (3:1–4)

Jealousy and quarreling over rival pastors are evidence of retarded spiritual development and a surrender to worldly influences. Paul really wasn’t expecting this. In view of the progress he had seen the Corinthian Christians make in other areas, he assumed that they were strong enough in their faith to avoid this kind of mistake. But he had expected too much. So he begins at square one with this topic, with the very basics of the Christian message. In subsequent chapters, he will pick up these threads of thought, explaining just what they ought to think about their pastors and how they ought to relate to them.

3 Servants Who Plant and Build (3:5–17)

What are spiritual leaders like Paul, Apollos, and Peter? They are servants, only servants. They are not to be centers of Christian loyalty and certainly not objects of faith. To be sure, they are servants of God through whom He does very important things. They plant the life-giving seed of God’s Word in the hearts of people. They present Jesus and all that He has done for us. They encourage us to listen to God’s Word and to consider it carefully, but only God can make this seed grow. And when that begins to happen, that is, when faith, saving trust in Jesus, appears in the hearts of their hearers, our pastors offer more of that Word to us. The Word of the

Gospel, which is the life-giving seed that awakens faith, is also the water of life that makes faith grow. So the Church is God's garden, and the members are His plants. Pastors and other spiritual leaders serve as the gardeners who plant and water, and—we might add—cultivate and pull out weeds. They do essential work, but human leaders should never be confused with the God whose garden it is and who is the ultimate source of life and growth. God values His gardeners and rewards them, but no one must ever put them in His place.

To develop this point still further, Paul shifts to a totally different illustration (vv. 9–17). He says to the Corinthians and to us, "You are God's building, God's temple. Your spiritual leaders are the construction workers who put up the building." Anyone who has had anything to do with a building project realizes how important the workers are. If they are careless about the material they use or about the way they put it together, the building will have serious problems. It may even collapse. Those who drive the nails and lay the bricks and install the wiring and the plumbing play a vital role in the construction. Still, no worker should be confused as being the architect or the owner.

From what material is our Lord's Church built? Paul refers to Jesus as the foundation. In his letter to the Ephesians (2:19–21), he explains more fully that Jesus is the cornerstone and the apostles and prophets (or, more specifically, the teaching of the apostles and prophets) are set right next to Him to complete the foundation. Atop that strong foundation rest all believers in Christ. Generation by generation, each new layer of stones is placed upon the previous one. So the Church grows, each of us a living stone set into that living structure. God builds not a house or a store but a temple. He dwells in it and is worshiped in it. He lives in the heart of each believer, and when we gather together in His name, He promises to be with us.

4 The Importance of Building Well (3:18–21)

A building is only as good as the material out of which it is built. The Church is only as strong as the individual members. A pastor has to be concerned about the spiritual and moral strength of each of God's people. When new people come into the congregation, he needs to assure himself as much as possible that they do know and trust in Jesus and that they want to live according to His will. No one can look into the heart of another per-

son and determine the genuineness of the faith found there. In one sense, we must take people at their word. However, God has made pastors responsible for instructing and examining prospective members in the faith. Adding unbelieving or uncommitted members to the congregation weakens rather than fortifies it. Of course, there is a place for weak and struggling believers in the Church. Jesus made that clear in His own outreach to such people. However, the pastor cannot, under God, simply accept this weakness. He must do whatever he can, to use God's powerful Word to help the weak grow stronger.

Paul puts it this way: The builder who puts cheap or shoddy material into a building is going to be shamed by its collapse. The pastor who carelessly adds unbelieving or uncommitted people to the congregation is going to be dismayed in the Day of Judgment when they are lost. He himself may still have saving faith, but by his negligent ministry he deprives others of it. The pastor who ignores the weaknesses of his members is not carrying out his divinely assigned responsibilities. In saying this, Paul is preparing his readers for some of what will follow in this letter. He is going to deal frankly with some of the spiritual and moral weaknesses in the congregation. He wants them to know why he must do this—for their welfare and that of the whole Church.

He anticipates their negative reaction. They think that they already know it all. They think they have grown beyond him and anything he has to offer. So he urges them to give up their great "wisdom" and humbly submit themselves to God's correction and to the "foolishness" of the cross, which is the source of the pardon and the power to improve that they need so desperately. He urges them again to give up their divisive loyalties to human leaders and to focus instead on Christ, in whom they have everything they need for this life and for that which is to come. If they focus on Him, everything else, including their attitude toward the Church's ministers, will fall into place.

5 Christ Is the Judge (4:1–5)

To whom are spiritual leaders accountable? Whom should they try to please? Whose opinion should matter most? Servants owe ultimate responsibility to their master. Spiritual leaders are the servants of Christ. Therefore, Christ, and Christ alone, has the final word to say about them and their ministry. What does Christ expect of His servants? Does He expect His servants to please every-

one? to be popular? to be impressively successful in a worldly sense?

No! Christ has entrusted His servants with a priceless treasure. Paul calls it “the secret things of God.” By that he means the Gospel of His saving and sacrificial love. Those who preach and teach the Gospel are not to lock this treasure up as in a safe, but to display it and share it with others; to proclaim “Christ and Him crucified” is the way Paul puts it in 2:2.

To do this effectively, of course, those who preach and teach the Word must also keep that message free of distortion and error. Their task is to present this treasure, to invite people to receive it, and to encourage them to depend on it and use its power to obey God’s will. Those who teach God’s Word can’t make anyone believe it or live in its power. Only the Holy Spirit can do that. Faithful pastors believe this Gospel with which they have been entrusted; they proclaim it and they demonstrate its value in their own lives. These are the criteria by which the Lord evaluates His servants now and will judge them on the Last Day.

That does not mean that God’s people are never to evaluate their spiritual leaders and their work. There is a sense in which all Christians must evaluate one another. In Galatians 6, Paul tells Christians what to do when another believer falls into sin. In 1 Corinthians 5:2–5, Paul makes it clear that in some situations we must judge one another. Our purpose, however, is not to condemn the other person or destroy his or her standing with others, but rather to help the wrongdoer to repent, to receive forgiveness, and to recover.

Sometimes, pastors and other spiritual leaders need this kind of help from those they lead. Judgment like this has a constructive purpose, not the kind of destructive purpose that Paul experienced from the Corinthians. We need to give our spiritual leaders the benefit of the doubt, putting the best construction on everything. We need to evaluate in fairness and generosity. But sin is sin, no matter who commits it. When spiritual leaders sin, they need help just like anyone else.

In judging our spiritual leaders, we need to keep several other points in mind. First, we need to distinguish between matters of right and wrong and matters of style and preference. The Corinthians seem to have condemned Paul based on style and preference. While these matter too, and while they can sometime affect the weak believers, we cannot set up absolute standards of conduct based on them. They are not nearly as important as matters of right and wrong.

Second, all human judgment is limited and tentative. We can never evaluate the motives of others with complete accuracy. We can’t even be absolutely sure about our own. We may do our best to be careful and fair, but only God has the insight and wisdom to make a perfect judgment. This fact gives us every reason to be humble and generous when we judge others. We are fallible and sinful ourselves. This does not excuse our failure to act when others seem to need help overcoming their sins, but it does make us cautious and understanding when we deal with others.

6 The Poverty of Arrogance (4:6–13)

The Corinthians’ problem was rooted in spiritual arrogance. Many in Corinth held a greatly exaggerated opinion of themselves and of their authority over against that of their spiritual leaders. They assumed that they were to determine which leaders were worthy of their respect. They felt they had the right to reject the ministry of anyone whose ministry no longer appealed to them. Now, it is true that a pastor or teacher is a servant of the congregation as well as a servant of God. Paul affirms that himself in a later letter to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 4:5).

God ordinarily works through a congregation’s members in calling a pastor. Pastors and other spiritual leaders are to accommodate their members’ interests and needs, as long as doing so does not conflict with God’s revealed will. In a later chapter of this letter, Paul says that he has become all things to all people so that by all means he might save some (9:22). From these words, we see that Paul wants pastors to care about meeting the expectations of members. Yet Paul emphasizes that the pastor’s call and ministry come from God (1:1). Congregations’ members are to accept their pastor and his ministry on those terms. Jesus once put this very strongly to His disciples: (Luke 10:16) “The one who hears you hears Me; and the one who rejects you rejects Me, and the one who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.”

Verses 8–13—Moving on, Paul responds to the arrogance of some in Corinth with sarcasm. In effect, he says, “You think you are so loaded down with spiritual gifts and authority that you can throw me away. I wish you were as well endowed as you think you are; then maybe you would share some of it with me. I am expendable, it seems, like a gladiator who dies for the amusement of others. For the sake of the Gospel, I

endure humiliation, weakness, deprivation, hardship, and abuse—even from those whom I serve. It must be nice to be as rich and as invulnerable and as highly honored as you are.”

Verses 14–17—Yet, despite Paul’s pain at their rejection, he does not want to shame them. He is talking to them as their spiritual father, their only spiritual father. He wants to turn them toward a more humble attitude, the kind of attitude Paul himself exemplifies. And he is sending their big brother, Timothy, to help them in that respect.

However, Paul makes it clear that he will not leave all this up to Timothy. Paul will be there before very long. He is prepared to act with all of his apostolic authority. Those who are so confident and arrogant now in their rejection of him will find out how tough he can be, if this is necessary. Still, he hopes that they will change their attitude so that he can be gentle with them.

Conclusion

As we interact with our spiritual leaders, we are to think neither too much of them, nor too little. We do not center our Christian loyalty in them or anchor our faith in them or split up the church over them. They are God’s servants and ours, and their job is to bring us to faith and strengthen us in that faith. Still, they are only servants. Our Master and theirs is Christ Himself. However, since their call is from God, and since their work is so important, we have every reason to appreciate and respect them and to value their ministry to us.

Concluding Activities

Speak a brief prayer, perhaps asking God to bless and guide the spiritual leaders of the congregation(s) to which the participants belong. Also ask God to bless the way all members of the congregation(s) work together. Then make any necessary announcements and distribute study leaflet 3.