LESSON FOUR

Built Different

"A Disciple Serves Humbly"

SCRIPTURE | 1 Corinthians 4:1–21

MEMORY VERSE

"I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought" (1 Corinthians 1:10).

MAIN IDEA OF THE TEXT

Built different: disciples humbly serve others rather than pridefully seeking recognition.

DISCIPLESHIP RHYTHM

Daily Devotion

GROUP TIME

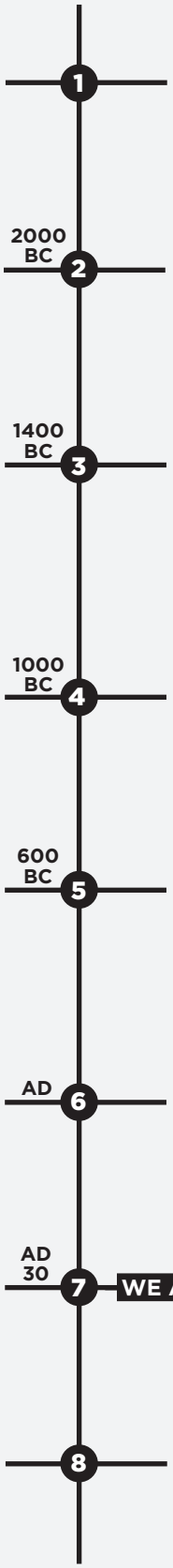
5 minutes	**Welcome**
5–10 minutes	**Attention Grabber**
10 minutes	**Story / Context**
25 minutes	**Discussion**
5–10 minutes	**Closing & Prayer**

PRAYER FOCUS

- **Rooted Launch (Sept. 8)** – Pray for the fall Rooted session. Pray for people to respond to the Spirit's prompting to sign up and commit to the experience. Pray for leaders to be filled with discernment and joy to shepherd.

BEGIN this time in prayer, confessing any sins you know of, thanking the Lord for the gift of his Word, and asking the Holy Spirit to guide your study.

GOD'S STORY TIMELINE



1. God Creates the World and Promises a Rescuer *(Genesis 1-11)*
God created everything good and placed humans in a garden to live in close relationship with Him. But Adam and Eve chose to trust themselves instead of God, and sin entered the world. Relationships, creation, even our connection to God was broken. Yet even in judgment, God promised that one day, a descendant of Eve would crush the serpent and bring healing.
+This points to Jesus as the promised Rescuer who defeats sin, Satan, and death.

2. God Calls a Family and Makes a Promise *(Genesis 12-50)*
God chose a man named Abram (later Abraham) and gave a covenant to him: that he would have a large family, receive a land, and be a blessing to all nations. Though Abraham and his descendants were deeply flawed, God continued His promise through Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.
+This points to Jesus as the true offspring of Abraham, through whom all nations are fully blessed.

3. God Rescues His People and Forms a Redeemed Nation *(Exodus-Deuteronomy)*
Generations later, Abraham's descendants were enslaved in Egypt. God raised up Moses to rescue them from oppression and slavery. God called His people into a relationship with Himself. He made a covenant with them, gave them the law, and instructed them in worship. He was forming a people who would live differently and show the world what it looked like to belong to Him.
+This points to Jesus as the greater Moses, who rescues us from slavery to sin and writes God's law on our hearts.

4. God Gives a Home and Promises a King *(Joshua-2 Chronicles)*
God brought His people into the promised land under Joshua's leadership. Over time, they asked for a king like the other nations. It was a disaster. But God graciously gave them David, with whom he made another covenant: one of David's descendants would rule forever. Solomon built the temple, but after his death, the kingdom split into two and began spiraling into idolatry and injustice again.
+This points to Jesus as the forever King from David's line, who reigns with justice and peace.

5. God Removes His People and Reminds Them of His Promise *(Ezra-Nehemiah)*
Because of their rebellion, God allowed His people to be conquered and taken into exile. First, it was the Northern Kingdom, Israel (to Assyria), then the Southern Kingdom, Judah (to Babylon). The temple was destroyed, and the glory of the kingdom faded. Yet God continued to speak through the prophets, reminding the people of His promise to restore them, give them new hearts, and send a Rescuer.
+This points to Jesus as the one who brings the new covenant, restores hearts, and fulfills every prophecy.

6. God Sends His Son and Fulfills His Promise *(Matthew-John)*
At just the right time, God sent Jesus into the world—born of a virgin, fully God and fully man. He perfectly obeyed the law, pointed us to the Father, and laid down His life as a sacrifice for our sins. On the third day, He rose again, proving that He is the Savior, the King, and the fulfillment of every covenant promise God has ever made.
+Jesus is the center of the story—all of Scripture leads to Him.

7. God Sends His Spirit and Builds His Church *(Acts-Jude)*
After rising from the dead, Jesus ascended into heaven and sent the Holy Spirit to empower His followers. The early Church spread the good news of Jesus across the Roman world—planting churches, welcoming both Jews and Gentiles, and learning to live as God's new covenant people. Though imperfect, the Church carries Jesus' mission forward today.
+This points to Jesus as the risen King who gives the Spirit to dwell in us and send us on mission.

8. God Restores All Things and Dwells with His People *(Revelation)*
The story isn't over. One day Jesus will return to judge evil and make all things new. There will be a new heaven and new earth, where God's people from every tribe and nation will live with Him forever. There will be no more pain, no more death, and no more sin—just joy, justice, and unbroken peace.
+This points to Jesus as the one who brings the story to its perfect and eternal culmination.

1 GRAB THEIR ATTENTION

LEADER TIP

To grab your participants' attention, start your lesson by telling a story related to the lesson's main idea. We have provided you with three options in this section, but feel free to develop your own.

OPTION 1: THE FOOL IN THE KING'S COURT

In royal courts, the fool or jester often looked like the least serious person in the room. He wore strange clothing, made people laugh, and stood outside the normal ranks of power. But sometimes the fool was the one person who could tell the truth no one else wanted to say.

One famous example is Stańczyk, a Polish court jester from the 1500s. He served several Polish kings and became remembered as a symbol of wisdom hidden beneath the appearance of foolishness. In a famous painting of him, the royal court is celebrating, but Stańczyk sits alone and troubled because he understands that devastating news has arrived for the kingdom. Everyone else looks comfortable and important, but the "fool" is the one who sees clearly.

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

• Which people are often overlooked because they are not thought of as important?
• Why do we tend to listen to people of status?

Transition Statement from Attention Grabber to Text:
The fool in the court may have looked unimpressive, but he could sometimes see what everyone else missed. In 1 Corinthians 4:1–21, Paul exposed a similar reversal. The Corinthians thought they were spiritually rich and impressive, but Paul showed that disciples are built different, because true greatness is measured by humble service and faithfulness before God.

OPTION 2: DAVID AND ELIAB

When David arrived at the battlefield in 1 Samuel 17, he was not the obvious hero. He was the youngest brother, sent by his father to deliver food and check on his older brothers. Eliab, David's oldest brother, looked more impressive. He was part of Israel's army and had already been noticed for his appearance when Samuel came to anoint the next king.

When David heard Goliath mocking Israel and defying the living God, he did not regard status as a prerequisite for action. Eliab became angry and accused David of pride and irresponsibility, but David was not the one misreading the moment. The threat from Goliath would not be eliminated by a person of qualification or status. The threat would be eliminated by the Lord.

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- *How did David see the situation differently than the people who looked stronger and more experienced?*
- *Where are we tempted to measure maturity by appearance, confidence, or status?*

Transition Statement from Attention Grabber to Text:
David looked unimpressive on the battlefield, but he saw clearly because he was looking at the situation through faith in God. In 1 Corinthians 4:1–21, Paul exposed a similar reversal. The Corinthians thought they were mature and impressive, but Paul showed that disciples are built different, because true faithfulness is measured by humble service before God, not recognition before people.

OPTION 3: THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES

In Hans Christian Andersen's story "The Emperor's New Clothes," two swindlers convince a proud emperor that they can make him a magnificent suit of clothes, invisible only to those who are foolish or unfit for their position. No one wants to admit they cannot see it, so the emperor, his officials, and the crowd all pretend he is dressed in splendor. The person who looks rich and impressive is actually exposed, while the child, who seems least important, is the only one willing to tell the truth.

The story gives us a picture of how pride can make people blind. When we are desperate to appear wise, successful, or important, we can lose the ability to see what is actually true. In 1 Corinthians 4, the Corinthians thought they were spiritually rich and impressive, while Paul and the apostles looked weak, dishonored, and expendable. But Paul showed them that disciples are built different. True spiritual maturity is not found in seeking recognition, but in humbly serving others before God.

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- *Why do we want to be impressive or important?*
- *Where do we see people confuse image and status with reality?*

Transition Statement from Attention Grabber to Text:
The emperor looked impressive to everyone willing to play along, but the truth told a different story. In 1 Corinthians 4:1–21, Paul exposed a similar reversal. The Corinthians thought they were rich and impressive, but Paul showed that disciples are built different, because true faithfulness is measured by humble service before God, not public recognition before people.

2 SET THE STAGE

LEADER TIP

This section provides the historical, cultural, and literary context needed to properly interpret and apply the text.

OUTLINE

I. Greetings and Thanksgiving (1:1–9)
II. Problems in the church (1:10–6:20)
  A. Divisions and factions (1:10–4:21)
  B. Gross immorality (5:1–13)
  C. Litigation before pagan courts (6:1–11)
  D. Fornication with prostitutes (6:12–20)
III. Replies to questions from the Corinthians (7:1–14:40)
  A. Questions about marriage (7:1–40)
  B. Limitations of Christian liberty (8:1–11:1)
  C. Veiling of women in public worship (11:2–16)
  D. Disorderly behavior at the Lord's Supper (11:17–34)
  E. Exercise of spiritual gifts (12:1–14:40)
IV. The Resurrection of the Body (15:1–58)
  A. Centrality of Christ's resurrection (15:1–20)
  B. Sequence of resurrection events (15:21–28)
  C. The resurrection and suffering (15:29–34)
  D. Nature of the resurrection body (15:35–49)
  E. The believer's victory over death (15:50–58)
V. Conclusion (16:1–24)
  A. Collection for the believers at Jerusalem (16:1–4)
  B. Paul's plans for visiting Corinth (16:5–9)
  C. Exhortations, instructions, and salutations (16:10–24)[1]

CONTEXT

The opening chapters of 1 Corinthians keep returning to one question: What does true maturity look like in the people of God? The Corinthians had confused maturity with impressive speech, preferred leaders, spiritual giftedness, and social status. They thought they were advanced, but Paul was showing them that their pride and rivalry revealed something far less mature. In 1 Corinthians 4, Paul turned directly to how they should view Christian leaders and Christian service. Leaders are not celebrities, spiritual trophies, or personal brands to claim. They are servants of Christ and stewards of what God has entrusted to them.

Paul then pressed the contrast further. The Corinthians imagined themselves as rich, wise, strong, and honored, while Paul and the apostles appeared weak, foolish, hungry, mistreated, and dishonored. But Paul was not embarrassed. The way of Jesus often looks upside down to the world. Disciples are built different, because they do not use calling, gifting, or service as a platform for recognition. They serve humbly, remain faithful, and leave the final evaluation in God's hands.

[1] F. Alan Tomlinson, "1 Corinthians," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1811.

FALLEN CONDITION FOCUS

Sin turns human beings inward to self-elevation. We crave significance, resist accountability, and measure worth by how we are seen by others. Instead of living before God as creatures dependent on His judgment and mercy, we try to become our own judges, masters, and sources of glory.

GOSPEL RESPONSE

Jesus is the faithful Son and true Servant who perfectly fulfilled the work the Father gave Him to do. Though He deserved all honor, He humbled Himself, took the form of a servant, and gave His life for the proud, self-exalting people we have become. Through Christ, we are forgiven, freed from the need to prove ourselves before others, and called into the joy of faithful service before God.

DISCIPLESHIP RHYTHM: SERVE THE COMMUNITY

To serve the community is to take the gifts of God in your life and put them to work for the good of someone else. It may include visible ministry, but it is not limited to church programs or official roles. It includes the ordinary callings, responsibilities, relationships, gifts, resources, and opportunities God entrusts to His people for the sake of others.

In 1 Corinthians 4, Paul helps the church see service through the lens of humble action. The question is not, “Did people think I was impressive?” but “Was I faithful with what God gave me?” That changes the way disciples serve. We do not have to compete for attention, control the outcome, or use our work to prove our importance. We can serve where there is need, receive our assignments with humility, and trust that the Lord sees what people may overlook.

Serving the community trains disciples to live with open hands. We are not owners of our gifts. We are not masters of our callings. We are people who are entrusted with something for a season. Faithfulness means using it for the good of others and the honor of Christ.

3 LOOK AT THE BOOK

LEADER TIP

In this section, you will find exercises you can use to lead your group through Observation, Interpretation, and Application. As the leader, work through all the exercises below to ensure you understand the text well.

1 Corinthians 4:1–5 Paul began by telling the Corinthians how they should regard him and the other apostles: "as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed." The word "servants" lowered the status the Corinthians were tempted to assign to their favorite leaders. Paul did not present himself as a celebrity, philosopher, or spiritual hero. He belonged to Christ and served under Christ's authority.

The word "entrusted" introduces the idea of stewardship. A steward was given responsibility over something that belonged to another. He might manage important affairs, but he was not the owner. Paul applied that image to Christian ministry. The gospel was not Paul's possession to use for his own reputation. It was a sacred trust given by God. That means the central characteristic was not impressiveness, popularity, or public approval but faithfulness.

Paul said, "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful." This sentence gives the heart of the passage. God entrusts His people with work to do, and faithfulness means carrying out that work as servants rather than owners. The Corinthians were evaluating leaders according to worldly standards of status and skill, but Paul brought the standard back to God. The question is not whether a servant gains attention but whether he is faithful to the Master.

This is why Paul refused to be controlled by human evaluation. He said it mattered very little to him if he were judged by the Corinthians or by any human group. Paul was not saying he was above correction, nor was he claiming his conduct did not matter. He was saying the final verdict on his faithfulness belonged to the Lord. He would not allow the Corinthians' opinions, or even his own self-assessment, to take God's place.

Paul added, "I do not even judge myself." A clear conscience is valuable, but it is not the same as final innocence. Paul knew he could not see himself with perfect clarity. Only the Lord can bring to light what is hidden in darkness and expose the motives of the heart. This does not make accountability less serious. It makes it more serious. Every servant will finally stand before the One who sees not only actions but motives.

Verse 5 warns the Corinthians against premature judgment. They were acting as though they had the authority to render final verdicts on God's servants. Paul told them to wait until the Lord came. When Christ returns, He will reveal what human beings cannot fully see. Then "each will receive their praise from God." Faithful service may be misunderstood, overlooked, or criticized now, but it is never hidden from the Lord.

1 Corinthians 4:6–7 Paul now explained why he used himself and Apollos as examples. He wanted the Corinthians to learn the meaning of the saying, "Do not go beyond what is written." The exact phrase may refer to the Scriptures Paul had already quoted in the letter, especially the passages that expose human boasting and worldly wisdom. The point is clear: God's Word should shape how they evaluated themselves

and their leaders. They must not go beyond God's revealed wisdom by adopting the prideful standards of their culture.

The result Paul wanted was that they "not be puffed up in being a follower of one of us over against the other." Pride had inflated their sense of importance. They were using leaders to elevate themselves, as though belonging to the right group made them spiritually superior. Paul saw this as a direct contradiction of the gospel. Spiritual leaders are servants, and spiritual gifts are received from God. There is no room for boasting as though any person or group is self-made.

Verse 7 confronts their pride with three questions: "Who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as though you did not?" These questions dismantle the illusion of self-importance. Everything the Corinthians had was received. Their salvation, gifts, knowledge, opportunities, and spiritual privileges were all gifts of grace. Pride treats gifts as achievements. Humility remembers that everything good has been given by God.

1 Corinthians 4:8–13 Paul then used sharp irony to expose how far the Corinthians' self-understanding has drifted from the way of the cross. "Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have begun to reign, and that without us!" The Corinthians were acting as though they had already arrived. They saw themselves as spiritually satisfied, prosperous, wise, strong, and honored. Paul's irony was meant to wake them up. Their confidence was not the same as maturity.

Paul said he wished they really had begun to reign, so the apostles might reign with them. That line shows that Paul was not against the future hope of glory. Believers will share in Christ's reign. The problem was that the Corinthians were trying to live as though the age of suffering, humility, and faithful service had already passed. They wanted the glory of the kingdom without the cruciform path of following Christ.

In verse 9, Paul described the apostles as those "at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die in the arena." The image is one of humiliation. Instead of being honored as kings, the apostles look like defeated captives displayed before the world. They had become "a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings." Paul's ministry did not look impressive according to Corinthian standards. It looked weak, costly, and shameful.

The contrast continues in verse 10: "We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored!" Paul was not praising the Corinthians. He was exposing the absurdity of their pride. They had embraced a version of spirituality that looked successful and impressive, while the apostles' lives bore the marks of suffering service. Paul wanted them to see that the way of Jesus often looks foolish to the world.

Verses 11–13 make the cost of apostolic ministry concrete. Paul mentioned hunger, thirst, rags, brutality, homelessness, hard work, curses, persecution, slander, and being treated as "the scum of the earth." Paul was not trying to gain pity; he was redefining faithfulness. Ministry is not validated by comfort, status, or applause. The apostles responded to curses with blessing, persecution with endurance, and slander with gracious answers. Their lives displayed the humble pattern of Christ.

This section reveals the upside-down ethic of the kingdom. The Corinthians thought they were rich, but their pride had made them blind. The apostles looked poor and dishonored, yet they were the ones embodying the way of Jesus. Paul was not saying that suffering automatically makes a person faithful. He was saying that faithful service often looks unimpressive to a world trained to honor power, status, and recognition.

1 Corinthians 4:14–17 Paul clarified his tone in verse 14: "I am writing this not to shame you but to warn you as my dear children." His words had been sharp, but his purpose was pastoral. He was not trying to crush them. He wanted to correct them before their pride destroyed them. The language of father and children shows affection, responsibility, and urgency.

Paul said they might have "ten thousand guardians in Christ," but they did not have many fathers. In the ancient world, a guardian could supervise a child, but a father had a deeper relationship and responsibility. Paul was reminding them that he brought the gospel to them and became a spiritual father to the church in Corinth. His correction was not detached criticism. It came from someone who loved them and had sacrificed for their good.

Then he said, "Therefore I urge you to imitate me." This can sound arrogant if separated from the surrounding passage, but Paul had just described himself as a servant, steward, fool, sufferer, and spiritual father. He was not asking them to imitate his personality or build his brand. He was calling them to imitate the pattern of humble, faithful, cross-shaped service.

Paul sent Timothy to help them remember his "way of life in Christ Jesus," which agreed with what he taught everywhere in every church. This matters because Paul's teaching was not merely verbal. His life and doctrine belonged together. The Corinthians needed more than correct information. They needed a living example of serving faithfully under Christ.

1 Corinthians 4:18–21 Paul closed the chapter by addressing those who had become arrogant. Some were acting as though Paul would not come to them, perhaps assuming his absence meant weakness or lack of authority. Paul said he would come, if the Lord willed, and he would find out not merely how these arrogant people were talking, but what power they had. The contrast between "talk" and "power" is important. The Corinthians admired speech, confidence, and public impressiveness. Paul wanted to know whether their lives showed the true power of God, which cannot be manufactured, only received.

"The kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power." Paul was not dismissing words, teaching, or doctrine. He was rejecting empty religious confidence that has no spiritual reality behind it. True kingdom power is not bluster, status, or verbal skill. In this context, it is the power of God that produces humility, faithfulness, endurance, love, and obedience.

Paul ended with a fatherly question: "What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline, or shall I come in love and with a gentle spirit?" The "rod" image reflects parental correction. Paul was not eager to be harsh, but he was willing to confront pride if necessary. Love does

not ignore arrogance that harms the church. A gentle spirit was possible if they received the warning and turned from their pride.

The chapter as a whole gives a theology of humble service. Disciples are servants of Christ, stewards of what God has revealed and given, accountable to the Lord, and called to faithfulness. They do not treat gifts, calling, or ministry as possessions to display to impress. They receive what God entrusts, use it for the good of others, endure misunderstanding when necessary, and leave the final evaluation to Him. A disciple is built different, because they humbly serve others rather than seeking recognition.

1 CORINTHIANS 4:1–21

This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and
as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. 2 Now it is
required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. 3 I
care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do
not even judge myself. 4 My conscience is clear, but that does not make
me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. 5 Therefore judge nothing
before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring
to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the
heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.

6 Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and
Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of
the saying, “Do not go beyond what is written.” Then you will not be
puffed up in being a follower of one of us over against the other. 7 For
who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you
did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though
you did not?

8 Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You
have begun to reign—and that without us! How I wish that you really
had begun to reign so that we also might reign with you! 9 For it
seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the
procession, like those condemned to die in the arena. We have been
made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human
beings. 10 We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are
weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! 11 To
this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally
treated, we are homeless. 12 We work hard with our own hands. When
we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; 13 when
we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the
earth, the garbage of the world—right up to this moment.

14 I am writing this not to shame you but to warn you as my dear
children. 15 Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not
have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the
gospel. 16 Therefore I urge you to imitate me. 17 For this reason I have
sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He
will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what
I teach everywhere in every church.

18 Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you.
19 But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I
will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what
power they have. 20 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk

but of power. 21 What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline, or shall I come in love and with a gentle spirit?

OBSERVATION: WHAT DOES IT SAY?

Gather in groups of three to five people to discuss the Observation and Interpretation questions.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 1: SERVANTS AND STEWARDS

Read 1 Corinthians 4:1–5. What label did Paul use to describe himself and the other apostles? What is required of those who have been entrusted with a responsibility?

Suggested Response: Paul said they should be regarded as servants. He taught that we must prove ourselves faithful when God trusts us with kingdom responsibilities.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 2: ALREADY REIGNING VS. PUBLICLY DISHONORED

Read 1 Corinthians 4:8–13. Make a list of the contrasts between apostles and the Corinthians.

Suggested Response: Paul said the Corinthians were acting as though they already had all they wanted, had become rich, and had begun to reign. He contrasted this with the apostles, who were displayed like those condemned to die. Paul said the Corinthians were wise, strong, and honored, while the apostles were fools for Christ, weak, and dishonored. He also described the apostles as hungry, thirsty, poorly clothed, brutally treated, homeless, hard-working, cursed, persecuted, slandered, and treated as the scum of the earth.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 3: A FATHERLY WARNING

Read 1 Corinthians 4:14–21. If Paul and the Corinthians were a family, what roles did Paul use to describe the relationship? What did he urge them to do?

Suggested Response: Paul described himself as their father. He said they should imitate him. He said he was not writing to shame them but to warn them as his dear children. He told them he was sending Timothy to remind them of his way of life in Christ Jesus. Paul also warned that he would come to them, if the Lord willed, and would find out not only how arrogant people were talking but what power they had.

INTERPRETATION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 1: FAITHFULNESS

What does it mean to be a steward of something? Why is it important to know who is measuring success, or faithfulness?

Suggested Response: A steward manages things that belong to someone else. Knowing the work belongs to God means the final evaluation also belongs to God. Paul wanted the Corinthians to understand that Christian ministry is not ownership, performance, or personal platform. People may misunderstand, praise, criticize, or compare, but the Lord is the One who sees clearly, judges rightly, and knows the motives of the heart.

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 2: THE TRUE MEASURE OF SUCCESS

Why did Paul contrast the Corinthians as rich, wise, strong, and honored with the apostles as weak, foolish, dishonored, and mistreated?

Suggested Response: Paul used irony to expose how wrongly the Corinthians were measuring spiritual maturity. They thought their confidence, status, and giftedness proved they were spiritually advanced, but their pride showed they were blind. The apostles looked unimpressive in the eyes of the world, yet their suffering, humility, endurance, and service displayed the way of Christ. Paul was showing that true maturity is not measured by recognition or comfort, but by faithful service that follows the pattern of Jesus.

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 3: TALK VERSUS KINGDOM POWER

What is the difference between arrogant talk and delivering results?

Suggested Response: Arrogant talk may sound confident, impressive, or spiritually mature, but it does not prove someone can deliver results. The power to achieve a life of substantial influence is received from God. The power of the kingdom shows up in a life changed by God: humility, faithfulness, endurance, love, obedience, and service. Paul wanted the Corinthians to see that true spiritual maturity is not measured by how strong someone sounds but by whether God's power is actually transforming their life.

APPLICATION: HOW DO I RESPOND?

QUESTION 1: Why is it hard to be humble rather than promote yourself?

Suggested Response: Every person has a desire to be known and valuable. God designed us this way. This good desire is counterfeited by Satan. Where God fulfills this desire through a relationship with Himself, Satan lies to us, saying we can fulfill this desire in ourselves by elevating ourselves before others.

LEADER TIP

In this section, you will find questions to choose from that will help your group consider how God calls them to respond to the text. Help your group set measurable action steps.

QUESTION 2: Paul said servants and stewards must be faithful with what is entrusted to them. What has God placed in your life that He asks you to steward faithfully? Are you a faithful steward?

Suggested Response: God gifts us and asks us to be faithful stewards with family, work, relationships, resources, spiritual gifts, or platforms of influence. Encourage your group to specifically (not just a general category) identify something in their life and speak it out loud.

These things are not random or accidental. They are areas of our lives where God wants to use us to bless others. Being faithful means leveraging the gift from God for the good of others, not for elevating ourselves. As your group responds, use follow-up questions to guide below surface-level responses. Encourage transparent responses.

QUESTION 3: Paul taught that God sees our motives, not just our actions. What difference does this make in your life?
Suggested Response: This can be both sobering and comforting. It is sobering because I cannot hide pride, selfishness, or the desire to be noticed from God. It is comforting because God also sees faithfulness that others miss, sacrifices that go unnoticed, and service that may never be publicly recognized.

QUESTION 4: What are some things in your life that are easy to treat as achievements instead of gifts?

Suggested Response: I may treat my abilities, opportunities, family, work ethic, knowledge, personality, resources, platform of influence, or spiritual growth as though they came from me because of my hard work or strategic activity. Paul's question reminds me that everything good has been received from God, which should lead to humble gratitude instead of pride.

QUESTION 5: In 1 Corinthians 4:8, Paul confronted the Corinthians for acting as though they were already full, rich, and reigning. Where are you tempted to act as though you have already arrived spiritually?

Suggested Response: I may act this way when I resist correction, assume I already understand, compare myself favorably to others, or become more aware of other people's immaturity than my own. Paul's warning reminds me that confidence is not the same as maturity. Oftentimes, my own area of giftedness is where I act as though I have arrived through my own wisdom or efforts.

QUESTION 6: How can you use the gifts God has given to you to serve others? What barrier do you face to serving others with this gift?

Suggested Response: Help your group process the gifts identified in questions 2 and 4 as opportunities to serve and bless others.

I may struggle to serve when it takes extra time, interrupts my plans, goes unnoticed, involves people who are difficult, or does not feel meaningful. Serving the community often requires more than good intentions. It means moving toward real needs with humility, patience, and faithfulness, even when the work is inconvenient or unseen.

Common categories of barriers are: I don't have enough time; I go to service and am in this Life Group so my time slots are full; I have a family

to take care of; my work schedule is full; I'm not sure where to start; I don't know what opportunities there are; etc.

QUESTION 7: What is one practical step you can take this week to serve someone with humility?

Suggested Response: I can look for a specific need in my home, workplace, neighborhood, church, or group and move to meet it without waiting to be asked or noticed. This may mean encouraging someone, meeting a practical need, giving my time, listening patiently, helping behind the scenes, or serving someone who cannot repay me.

QUESTION 8: How can our group serve together regularly? How can we invite someone who is not serving to join us in serving?

*** Suggested Response** Ask your group's Serve Coordinator to connect with the campus Missions Manager or Operations Pastor to have some serving opportunities identified before your group gathers. Plan the serving opportunity and call your group to it. You are encouraged to plan and prepare in advance so the group does not spend the time deliberating possibilities. Rather, take action together. Not everyone will be able to join, and that is okay.*

4 CHALLENGE

LEADER TIP

End your study time with one final challenge and prayer. Your final challenge should pull together everything you covered in this lesson and call your participants to action.

A disciple is built different because they understand their life is not their own. God gives gifts, opportunities, relationships, resources, and callings, but He gives them as trusts to be stewarded faithfully. We are not owners trying to build our own importance. We are servants and stewards who will one day stand before the Lord.

This week pay attention to what God has placed in your hands.

- Where are you tempted to treat something God gave you as though it belongs to you?
- Where has pride made it hard for you to receive correction, serve quietly, or love someone humbly?
- What is one specific way you can use what God has entrusted to you for the good of another person?

The world teaches us to measure life by recognition, comfort, influence, and control. Jesus teaches us a different way. Faithfulness may look small, costly, or unimpressive, but nothing entrusted to Christ and offered for others is wasted.

Let's pray.