LESSON FIFTEEN

Built Different

"A Disciple Builds Up the Church"

SCRIPTURE | 1 Corinthians 14:1–40

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 leverage their gifts for the edification of the church.

DISCIPLESHIP RHYTHM

Discipleship Distinctive: Discipling Relationships

GROUP TIME

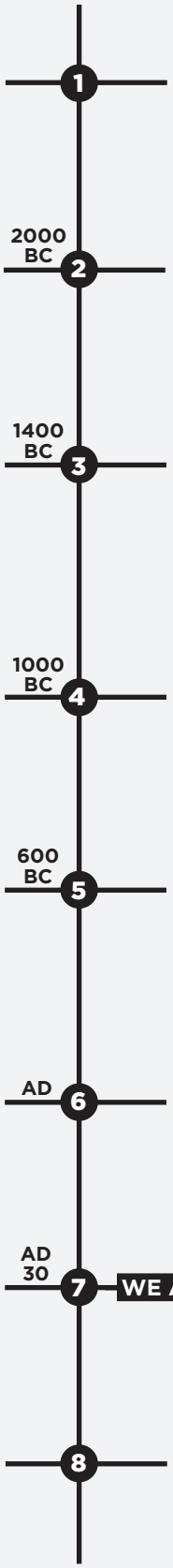
5 minutes	**Welcome**
5–10 minutes	**Attention Grabber**
10 minutes	**Story / Context**
25 minutes	**Discussion**
5–10 minutes	**Closing & Prayer**

PRAYER FOCUS

- **Into the Breach Commitment Weekend** – Pray that God will multiply the kingdom impact of our discipleship initiative and the commitments being made this weekend.
- **Rooted Celebration** – The fall Rooted session concludes next week with a celebration. Thank God for the work He has done transforming lives and building up disciples.

<u>BEGIN</u> 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 MARS CLIMATE ORBITER

In 1999 NASA lost the Mars Climate Orbiter because two teams were working with different measurement systems. One team used English units, while another used metric units. Everyone involved was top in their field, but because the information wasn't shared in a way that matched across the teams, the orbiter came too close to Mars and was lost.

The problem was not a lack of intelligence, skill, or effort. It was a failure of understandable communication. The right information, used in a way others could not properly receive, did not help the mission. It ruined it.

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- *Have you ever experienced a failure in communication? What was that like?*
- *What happens when a talented person is unable to communicate in a helpful way?*

Transition Statement from Attention Grabber to Text:
The Mars Climate Orbiter reminds us that ability does not help the mission if people cannot understand and use what is being communicated. In 1 Corinthians 14:1–40, Paul taught that spiritual gifts should build up the church through clarity, order, and love. Disciples are built different because they leverage their gifts for the edification of the church.

OPTION 2: BABEL, PENTECOST, AND UNDERSTANDABLE SPEECH

In Genesis 11, the people at Babel gathered to build a city and a tower so they could "make a name" for themselves. Their shared language became a tool for pride. They wanted greatness, security, and significance apart from God. So, the Lord confused their language and scattered them.

In Acts 2, something different happened. The Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, and people from many nations heard the disciples declaring the wonders of God in their own languages. The gift of tongues did not make the disciples' names great. It made God's work understandable to the people listening and created unity around Christ. That connects closely to 1 Corinthians 14. The Corinthians needed to learn that spiritual gifts are not given for self-display. They are given so others can be blessed and built up.

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- *Have you experienced someone elevating themselves because of a talent or skill? What was that like?*
- *Who is an example of someone using their talent to bring others together?*

Transition Statement from Attention Grabber to Text:
Babel and Pentecost show two very different ways speech can be used. One tried to "make our name great." The other made God's work known. In 1 Corinthians 14:1–40, Paul taught that spiritual gifts should be used with clarity and love so the church is built up. Disciples are built different because they leverage their gifts for the edification of the church.

OPTION 3: THE EMERGENCY ROOM TEAM

When a patient comes into an emergency room, a lot of people are involved in their care. Doctors, nurses, technicians, pharmacists, and lab workers all have specific training and skill. Timely and helpful care is provided when everyone works together to meet the specific needs of the patient. It is not helpful if specialists talk over one another, use language no one else understands, or act without regard for the rest of the team.

That is why clear communication and ordered care matter. The goal is not for one person to prove how much they know. The goal is for the patient to be helped. In the same way, the church is not built up simply because gifted people are present. The church is built up when disciples use their gifts in ways that strengthen the people around them.

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- *What happens in an emergency room if everyone acts independently of one another?*
- *How can a person have real talent but fail to help others?*

Transition Statement from Attention Grabber to Text:
An emergency room team reminds us that ability is only helpful when it serves the good of others. In 1 Corinthians 14:1–40, Paul taught that spiritual gifts should be used with clarity, order, and love so the church is built up. Disciples are built different because they leverage their gifts for the edification of the church.

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 Corinthians seemed drawn to gifts that appeared more dramatic or impressive, especially speaking in tongues, but Paul kept one diagnostic question at the center: does this build up the church? In 1 Corinthians 14, he compared speaking in tongues and prophecy, explained why understandable words matter, gave instructions for ordered worship, and reminded the Corinthians that God's people should not gather in confusion. Gifts are given by the Spirit, and they are meant to serve the body. Disciples are built different because they leverage their gifts for the edification of the church.

FALLEN CONDITION FOCUS

We desire to be noticed more than we desire to serve and put others first. We tend to value what seems impressive as the mark of achievement rather than what builds others up. This brings disorder into the community because our gifts are aimed at ourselves instead of service. At our core, apart from Christ, we use our words, abilities, and influence to draw attention to ourselves instead of Him.

[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.

GOSPEL RESPONSE

Jesus used His power to serve and His words to bring life. He gave up position and applause for sinners so His people would be forgiven, made one, and built up together in Him. Through the Holy Spirit, God gives gifts to His church so disciples can strengthen one another, speak what is helpful, and point people to Christ. Because we belong to Jesus, we can use what He has given us for the good of His people rather than the praise of ourselves.

DISCIPLESHIP RHYTHM: DISCIPLESHIP DISTINCTIVE: LOVE AND SERVICE

Discipling relationships are the norm for believers. We help one another follow Jesus. This happens when someone opens Scripture with another person, asks honest questions, prays with them, speaks truth with care, and helps them take the next faithful step. Discipleship is not limited to a platform or a formal role. Much of it happens through impromptu conversations and loving words offered at the right time for the good of another person.

In 1 Corinthians 14 Paul was concerned that the Corinthians use their gifts for the good of others. A gift that draws attention but does not build up misses the point. In discipling relationships, the goal is not to sound impressive or prove what we know. The goal is to strengthen someone else's faith.

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 14:1–5 Paul had just said love is greater than every gift, and here he told the Corinthians to "follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit" (v. 1). Love does not make spiritual gifts unnecessary. Love gives them their aim. In the gathered church, the question is not which gift draws the most attention but which gift helps people understand, respond, and grow.

That is why Paul said he would especially have them prophesy (v. 1). In this chapter, prophecy is intelligible speech that strengthens the church by bringing God's truth to bear on God's people. Paul described its purpose in verse 3: "strengthening, encouraging and comfort." This is the heart of the chapter. A gift is being used rightly when it builds up the people who experience it.

Tongues function differently in this passage. The person speaking in a tongue "does not speak to people but to God" unless there is interpretation (v. 2). Paul was not mocking tongues or denying they are a real gift. He said the person who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, while the one who prophesies edifies the church (v. 4). The issue is usefulness in the gathering. Paul could say, "I would like every one of you to speak in tongues" and still say, "I would rather have you prophesy" (v. 5) because the gathered church needs gifts that can be understood.

Verse 5 sets the basic rule for the rest of the chapter: tongues must be interpreted if they are going to build up the church. Without interpretation, the gift may be meaningful between the speaker and God, but it does not strengthen the congregation. Paul was teaching the Corinthians to measure gathered worship by edification, not by personal experience.

1 Corinthians 14:6–12 Verses 6–12 explain why understanding is so important. Paul asked what good it would do if he came and spoke in tongues without some kind of clear communication—revelation, knowledge, prophecy, or instruction (v. 6). The church is helped when people can understand what is being said and know how to respond.

Paul used musical instruments to make the point. A flute, harp, or trumpet must give a distinct sound (vv. 7–8). If the notes are unclear, the song cannot be followed. If the trumpet call is uncertain, soldiers do not know to prepare for battle. The problem is not sound itself. The problem is sound that does not communicate.

The same principle applies to speech in the church. "Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying?" (v. 9). The Corinthians may have been impressed by the experience of tongues, but Paul kept asking what the gift does for the person who hears it. With no way to understand, the hearer remains an outsider to the meaning.

Verse 12 brings the section home: "Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church." Paul did not

criticize their desire for spiritual gifts. He redirected it. If they wanted to be zealous, they should be zealous for gifts used in a way that strengthens the body.

1 Corinthians 14:13–19 In verses 13–19, Paul applied the same concern to prayer and praise. If someone speaks in a tongue, they should pray that they may interpret what they say (v. 13). Interpretation turns private edification into something the church can receive.

Paul then spoke about praying and singing with both spirit and mind (vv. 14–15). He was not setting the Spirit against the mind. He wanted worship that engages the whole person and can be understood by the gathered church. The mind matters because love cares whether others can join in.

Verse 16 gives a simple test: if someone praises God in a way others cannot understand, how can the person listening say "amen"? "Amen" is the response of agreement. It means the listener has understood enough to join the praise. Paul even said the thanksgiving may be genuine, but "no one else is edified" (v. 17). A real spiritual expression can still fail to serve the gathered body if it remains unintelligible.

Paul was clear that he valued tongues. "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you" (v. 18). Yet in the church he would rather speak five understandable words than ten thousand words in a tongue (v. 19). That comparison is intentionally lopsided. Paul was showing how much he valued the edification of the church. In gathered worship, a few words that instruct others are better than many words no one can understand.

1 Corinthians 14:20–25 Verse 20 calls the Corinthians to maturity: "Brothers and sisters, stop thinking like children." Childishness prizes what feels impressive in the moment. Maturity asks what love requires. Paul wanted them to be innocent about evil but grown up in their thinking.

He then quoted Isaiah 28:11–12, where foreign speech was a sign of judgment on unbelieving Israel. The point is difficult, but Paul's concern was clear in the verses that follow. Tongues without interpretation can function as a sign that leaves unbelievers outside understanding. If outsiders enter the gathering and hear everyone speaking in tongues, they may conclude that the church is out of its mind (v. 23).

Prophecy has a different effect because it can be understood. If an unbeliever or inquirer enters while the church is prophesying, Paul said that person may be convicted, called to account, and have the secrets of the heart laid bare (vv. 24–25). The result is worship: "God is really among you!" Understandable speech can expose the heart and point people to the presence of God.

This section shows Paul was concerned for both believers and outsiders. Gathered worship should build up the church, and it should not create needless confusion for those who do not yet believe. The Corinthians' use of gifts needed to reflect love for the whole room.

1 Corinthians 14:26–33 Verse 26 gives a window into a Corinthian worship gathering. One person might bring a hymn, another a word of instruction, another a revelation, another a tongue, another an

interpretation. Paul did not seem troubled by broad participation. His concern was what governs it: “Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.”

He then gave instructions for tongues. Two or three may speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret (v. 27). If there is no interpreter, the speaker should remain silent in the church and speak to himself and to God (v. 28). The instruction is practical and pastoral. A genuine gift does not have to be exercised at every moment. Love can wait.

Prophecy is also to be ordered. Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said (v. 29). Prophetic speech is not treated as uncontrolled or beyond evaluation. The church listens with discernment. If a revelation comes to someone else, the first speaker should stop, so all may learn and be encouraged (vv. 30–31).

Verse 32 is important: “The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets.” Paul did not accept the excuse that spiritual experience makes self-control impossible. The Holy Spirit does not produce chaos that harms the body. “God is not a God of disorder but of peace” (v. 33). Order in worship is not the enemy of the Spirit. It is one of the ways love makes room for the whole church to be strengthened.

1 Corinthians 14:34–40 Verses 34–35 are among the most discussed verses in the chapter because Paul said women should remain silent in the churches. These words must be read alongside 1 Corinthians 11:5, where Paul spoke of women praying and prophesying. Paul could not mean that women may never speak under any circumstance in the gathered church since he had already acknowledged their participation.

The immediate context is ordered evaluation in the gathering. Paul had just told tongue-speakers to be silent if there were no interpreter and prophets to be silent when another receives revelation. The silence commanded here likely addresses a disruptive kind of speaking, possibly questioning or weighing prophetic words in a way that brought disorder or dishonor in that setting. Paul’s concern remained the same as the rest of the chapter: the gathered church should be marked by peace, honor, and edification.

In verses 36–38, Paul confronted Corinthian arrogance. They were not the source of God’s word, and they were not the only church that must receive apostolic instruction. Spiritual people should recognize Paul’s commands as from the Lord (v. 37). Gifts do not place a person above correction. A church shaped by the Spirit remains teachable under the word of Christ.

The final instructions summarize the chapter. “Be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues” (v. 39). Paul held both together. He did not shut down spiritual gifts, and he did not allow them to be used selfishly or chaotically. “Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way” (v. 40).

1 CORINTHIANS 14:1–40

14 Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit,
especially prophecy. 2 For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not
speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they
utter mysteries by the Spirit. 3 But the one who prophesies speaks to
people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort. 4 Anyone
who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies
edifies the church. 5 I would like every one of you to speak in tongues,
but I would rather have you prophesy. The one who prophesies is
greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets,
so that the church may be edified.

6 Now, brothers and sisters, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what
good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge
or prophecy or word of instruction? 7 Even in the case of lifeless things
that make sounds, such as the pipe or harp, how will anyone know what
tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes? 8 Again, if
the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? 9
So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue,
how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking
into the air. 10 Undoubtedly there are all sorts of languages in the
world, yet none of them is without meaning. 11 If then I do not grasp the
meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and
the speaker is a foreigner to me. 12 So it is with you. Since you are eager
for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church.

13 For this reason the one who speaks in a tongue should pray that they
may interpret what they say. 14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays,
but my mind is unfruitful. 15 So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit,
but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit,
but I will also sing with my understanding. 16 Otherwise when you are
praising God in the Spirit, how can someone else, who is now put in the
position of an inquirer, say “Amen” to your thanksgiving, since they do
not know what you are saying? 17 You are giving thanks well enough,
but no one else is edified.

18 I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. 19 But in the
church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than
ten thousand words in a tongue.

20 Brothers and sisters, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be
infants, but in your thinking be adults. 21 In the Law it is written:

> “With other tongues
> and through the lips of foreigners
> I will speak to this people,
> but even then they will not listen to me,
> says the Lord.”

22 Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers;
prophecy, however, is not for unbelievers but for believers. 23 So if
the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues,
and inquirers or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out
of your mind? 24 But if an unbeliever or an inquirer comes in while
everyone is prophesying, they are convicted of sin and are brought
under judgment by all, 25 as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare. So
they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, “God is really among
you!”

26 What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come
together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation,
a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the
church may be built up. 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the
most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret.
28 If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church
and speak to himself and to God.

29 Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh
carefully what is said. 30 And if a revelation comes to someone who is
sitting down, the first speaker should stop. 31 For you can all prophesy
in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. 32 The
spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. 33 For God is
not a God of disorder but of peace—as in all the congregations of the
Lord's people.

34 Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed
to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. 35 If they want to
inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home;
for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

36 Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only
people it has reached? 37 If anyone thinks they are a prophet or
otherwise gifted by the Spirit, let them acknowledge that what I am
writing to you is the Lord's command. 38 But if anyone ignores this, they
will themselves be ignored.

39 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do
not forbid speaking in tongues. 40 But everything should be done in a
fitting and orderly way.[2]

[2] *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 1 Corinthians 14:1–40.

OBSERVATION: WHAT DOES IT SAY?

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

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 1: GIFTS THAT BUILD UP

Read 1 Corinthians 14:1–12. How did Paul describe the spiritual gifts of prophecy and speaking in tongues? Write a list of descriptions for each one.

Suggested Response:

Prophecy	***Tongues***
• Should be earnestly desired (v. 1) *• Communicates a message others can understand (vv. 2–3)* *• Speaks to people (v. 3)* *• Builds up/edifies others (v. 3)* *• Encourages others (v. 3)* *• Consoles/comforts others (v. 3)* *• Benefits the gathered church (v. 4)* *• Can be more beneficial to the church than uninterpreted tongues (v. 5)*	*• Is directed toward God when uninterpreted (v. 2)* *• Is not understood by the hearers unless interpreted (vv. 2, 5)* *• Can involve speaking mysteries by the Spirit (v. 2)* *• Builds up the individual speaker (v. 4)* *• Does not build up the church without interpretation (vv. 4–5)* *• Can benefit the church when accompanied by interpretation (v. 5)* *• Is compared to an instrument producing an indistinct sound when not understood (vv. 7–8)* *• Requires intelligible speech to communicate effectively (vv. 9–11)* *• Can become a barrier to understanding when its meaning is unknown (vv. 10–11)*

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 2: UNDERSTANDABLE WORDS

Read 1 Corinthians 14:13–25. Paul said that, while using spiritual gifts, others should be able to understand what is being said. How did Paul explain the need for things to be understood?

Suggested Response: Paul said the person who speaks in a tongue should pray to interpret. He will pray and sing with both his spirit and his understanding. If others cannot understand, they cannot be in agreement (say "Amen"). He said he would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue. He also said understandable prophecy can convict unbelievers or inquirers and lead them to recognize that God is among His people.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 3: ORDER IN THE GATHERING

Read 1 Corinthians 14:26–40. Paul talked about how people should behave when the church gathers. What instructions did he give? Make a list.

Suggested Response: Paul said everything must be done so the church may be built up. Tongues should be limited, one at a time, and interpreted. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should remain silent in the church. Prophets should also speak in order, while others weigh what is said. Paul said God is not a God of disorder but of peace, and everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

INTERPRETATION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 1: GIFTS ARE MEANT TO HELP THE CHURCH

According to 1 Corinthians 14:1–12, why is prophecy more helpful than uninterpreted tongues when the church gathers?

Suggested Response: Prophecy is more helpful in the gathering because people can understand it and be strengthened by it. Paul was not rejecting tongues, but he kept measuring gifts by whether they build up the church. A gift may be real and still fail to help the body if others cannot receive what is being said. Love teaches disciples to care about the good of the people listening, not only the experience of the person speaking.

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 2: WHAT'S IN A WORD?

In 1 Corinthians 14:13–25, why did Paul care so much about words people can understand?

Suggested Response: Paul wanted worship to include the whole church, not leave people outside the meaning of what was happening. If someone cannot understand the prayer or praise, they cannot say "amen." This means they cannot be in agreement with the things spoken. If an unbeliever or outsider comes in, confusing speech may push them away, but understandable truth can expose the heart and point them to God. Paul was teaching that clear words can become a form of love because they help people respond to the truth.

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 3: ORDER IS CENTRAL

In 1 Corinthians 14:26–40, how do orderly worship gatherings help the church grow?

Suggested Response: Paul's instructions show that spiritual gifts are not meant to create confusion or competition in the gathering. Tongues need interpretation. Prophecy should be weighed. People should speak in turn. This order does not limit the work of the Spirit; it helps the church receive it well. God is not a God of disorder but of peace, so worship should reflect His character and strengthen His people. Disciples are built different because they leverage their gifts for the edification of the church.

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.

Leaders – share your story with your group. It takes 3-5 minutes. You are modeling this for your group, so follow the guidelines. (Click here for the guidelines).

Challenge – group people into 2's or 3's and have them prepare to share their story with each other next week. Set aside 15-20 minutes of your group time for this.

APPLICATION: HOW DO I RESPOND?

QUESTION 1: In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul's central concern was that a gift builds up the church. What has God given you that could help others grow? Are you actively using your gift? What might be a next step?

Suggested Response: God may have given me the ability to teach, encourage, listen, organize, serve, pray, show hospitality, explain Scripture, or notice people who feel unseen. The point is not whether my gift feels impressive. The question is whether I am using what God has given me to help others follow Jesus.

As your group responds, use follow-up questions to guide below surface-level responses. Encourage transparent responses to shepherd your group toward understanding how they have a part to play and consider if God might be moving them toward a next step.

QUESTION 2: Paul said the one who prophesies speaks to people so they will be strengthened, encouraged, and comforted. Tell about a time someone encouraged you recently. How can you encourage someone this week?

Suggested Response: My words can strengthen someone when I take the time to listen to what is going on in their lives, then speak truth clearly and lovingly. I can encourage them to keep following Jesus and take another step of faith or remind them of God's faithfulness. This may happen in a conversation, a text, a prayer, or a moment someone needs help seeing what is true.

QUESTION 3: Paul said unclear words can leave people outside the meaning of what is happening. Where do you need to communicate with more clarity and care?

Suggested Response: I may need to speak more clearly with my family, group, coworkers, or someone I am trying to disciple. Clarity is not only about using the right words. It is about loving people enough to make sure they can understand and receive what is being said. This often means I first need to do the work of meeting someone where they are, which includes listening to them and discerning.

QUESTION 4: Paul said others should be able to say "amen" when God's people pray or give thanks. This means they are able to affirm agreement and alignment. How can you help someone, like a first-time guest, participate in worship rather than feel left out?

Suggested Response: I can help someone participate by noticing who may be confused or uncertain of where to go. It could also be as simple as sitting in the middle of a section rather than at the end of a row so others do not have to bother me to find a seat. When I speak to others, I can intentionally avoid using "Christianese." Disciples are motivated to help others connect with Jesus. Loving others seeks to help them understand, join in, and take their next step toward Jesus. Going back to previous lessons, I may need to embrace differences and let go of my preferences to invite someone in who is different from me.

QUESTION 5: How does considering the needs of others help you use your gifts more faithfully?

Suggested Response: When I think about the person receiving what I offer, I often have to become more patient, clear, gentle, prepared, or attentive. I can think about what would actually strengthen them right now. Paul reminded us that gifts are given for the good of the body, so faithfulness means using what God has given in a way that helps others be built up.

QUESTION 6: How can our group practice discipling relationships that build up the church?

Suggested Response: Our group can build discipling relationships by helping one another understand Scripture, praying together, speaking encouragement, asking honest questions, and pointing one another back to Jesus. We can look for people who need support and use our gifts to strengthen them. Disciples are built different because they leverage their gifts for the edification of the church.

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.

Disciples are built different because they leverage their gifts for the edification of the church. Paul did not tell the Corinthians to stop caring about spiritual gifts. He taught them to care about whether their gifts were actually helping the church. Love asks whether people can understand, receive, and be strengthened by what we bring.

This week consider how God might use you to build up His people.

- Who needs strengthening, encouragement, or comfort from you this week?
- Where can your words become clearer, gentler, or more useful for someone else's good?
- How can you use a gift, experience, or opportunity God has given you to help someone take a next step with Jesus?

God gives gifts to His people because the church needs to be built up. When disciples use what they have received in love, the body is strengthened, the gospel becomes clearer, and Christ is honored.

Let's pray.