

# How to use Explore

## In this issue

The 90 daily readings in this issue of *Explore* are designed to help you understand and apply the Bible as you read it each day.

## It's serious!

We suggest that you allow 15 minutes each day to work through the Bible passage with the notes. It should be a meal, not a snack! Readings from other parts of the Bible can throw valuable light on the study passage. These cross-references can be skipped if you are already feeling full up, but they will expand your grasp of the Bible. *Explore* uses the NIV Bible translation, but you can also use it with the ESV or another translation of your choice.

Sometimes a prayer section will encourage you to stop and pray through the application of God's word—but it is always important to allow time to pray for God's Spirit to bring his word to life, and to shape the way we think and live.

## We're serious!

All of us who work on *Explore* share a passion for getting the Bible into people's lives. We passionately hold to the Bible as God's word—to honour and follow, not to explain away.

1

Find a time you can read the Bible each day

2

Find a place where you can be quiet and think

3

Ask God to help you understand

4

Carefully read through the Bible passage for today

5

Study the verses with *Explore*, taking time to think

6

Pray about what you have read

the goodbook  
COMPANY

*Opening up the Bible*

# Welcome to Explore

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Being a Christian isn't a skill you learn, like carpentry or flower arranging. Nor is it a lifestyle choice, like the kind of clothes you wear, or the people you choose to hang out with. It's about having a real relationship with the living God through his Son, Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us that this relationship is like a marriage.

It's important to start with this, because many Christians view the practice of daily Bible-reading as a Christian duty, or a hard discipline that is just one more thing to get done in our busy modern lives.

But the Bible is God speaking to us: opening his mind to us on how he thinks, what he wants for us and what his plans are for the world. And most importantly, it tells us what he has done for us in sending his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. It's the way the Spirit shows Jesus to us, and changes us as we behold his glory.

The Bible is not a manual. It's a love letter. And as with any love letter, we'll want to treasure it, and make time to read and re-read it, so we know we are loved, and discover how we can please the one who loves us. Here are a few suggestions for making your daily time with God more of a joy than a burden:

☛ *Time:* Find a time when you will not be disturbed, and when the cobwebs are cleared from your mind. Many people have found that the morning is the best time as it sets you up for the day. If you're not a "morning person", then last thing

at night or a mid-morning break might suit you. Whatever works for you is right for you.

☛ *Place:* Jesus says that we are not to make a great show of our religion (see *Matthew 6:5-6*), but rather, to pray with the door to our room shut. Some people plan to get to work a few minutes earlier and get their Bible out in an office or some other quiet corner.

☛ *Prayer:* Although *Explore* helps with specific prayer ideas from the passage, try to develop your own lists to pray through. Use the flap inside the back cover to help with this. And allow what you read in the Scriptures to shape what you pray for yourself, the world and others.

☛ *Share:* As the saying goes—*expression deepens impression*. So try to cultivate the habit of sharing with others what you have learned. Why not join our Facebook group to share your encouragements, questions and prayer requests? Search for *Explore: For your daily walk with God*.

And remember, *it's quality, not quantity, that counts*: better to think briefly about a single verse than to skim through pages without absorbing anything. It's about developing your relationship with the living God. The sign that your daily time with God is real is when you start to love him more and serve him more wholeheartedly.

Tim Thornborough and Carl Laferton  
Editors



# Death without decay

*Death can seem a hopeless prospect and can make life appear meaningless. We need to take to heart David's reflections on a God-directed life and a God-filled death.*

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## Read Psalm 16

### The source of hope

- ❓ *How does David express:*
  - his weakness and need (v 1)?
  - his own standing before God (v 2, v 5)?
  - his delight in God's presence (v 7-8)?
- ❓ *Where does he find direction, joy and pleasure (v 11)?*
- ❓ *How does this kind of attitude towards God shape David's attitude towards God's people (v 3)?*
- ❓ *What is his attitude to those who are rejecting God (v 4)?*

### Apply

- ❓ *Can you say, and mean, verse 2?*
- ❓ *Of what else, or who else, are you tempted to say: "You are what directs my life; you are what I most need in life"?*

Often we equate success with lasting satisfaction. But verse 11 reminds us that "joy" and "pleasures" are really only found in living with God as Lord.

- ❓ *Do you need to turn away from chasing personal glory?*

### Eternal hope

#### Re-read Psalm 16:9-11

- ❓ *What does David know about his future?*

Ultimate hope comes in verse 10: "You will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay".

#### Read Acts 2:24-32

- ❓ *What event was David looking towards in Psalm 16:10?*
- ❓ *So where is David ultimately looking for eternal life and lasting joy?*

What faithful David looked forward to, we look back on as believers today. Our confidence in life and in death does not come from ourselves, but from the one who conquered the grave and is Lord of life.

### Pray

As we embark on another new year, scan through your plans and think about what you hope to achieve in it, and the people you want to serve, love and help.

Commit the coming year to the Lord in the knowledge that he is your salvation and hope.

# Badly treated

When you're badly treated—when people sin against you—what is your natural reaction towards those who are abusing you?

## Listening

### Read Psalm 17:1-6

- ❓ *What does David ask (v 1, 6)?*
- ❓ *What does he know about his own conduct (v 3-5)? Why does this matter?*
- ❓ *What is most important to David (v 2)?*

God's people live repentant lives. We should never want any sin to be lingering unnoticed. Before we point the finger at others, we need to examine ourselves.

## Pray

If, as you look at your life over the last week, you can't say what David can say here of his own conduct, then spend some time confessing how:

- your mouth has sinned (v 3).
- you haven't followed God's way (v 5).

## Sheltering

### Read Psalm 17:7-12

- ❓ *What is David asking for (v 7-9)?*

God is glorified—the wonder of his love is shown—when we come to him in weakness and he acts for us in strength.

## Receiving help

### Read Psalm 17:13-15

God's sovereign will is what brings about

changes in our circumstances.

- ❓ *Who does David recognise will be the victor in his struggle?*

There are two ways to live in this world: like David, seeking to live for God and trusting him to provide, or like David's opponents. While David's future is wonderful (remember Psalm 16), those who live without God know only the partial, fleeting joys of this life (Psalm 17:14).

David is totally satisfied with “seeing” God (v 15)—with knowing and being known by him.

Facing what is a challenging time, sinned against by those around him, he knows that one day he will be perfectly righteous, and will be in God's presence. And this hope is for us who are in Christ today.

## Apply

Are you reflecting on the hope of heaven as you struggle with difficult people and challenging situations in the present?

Fast forward to heaven in your heart as you face the difficulties of the present. And remember what Psalm 17 teaches us when we are being sinned against: to examine ourselves, to pray, and to trust in God's sovereign hand at work in us, and in the world.



# 1 CORINTHIANS:

## The trouble with idolatry

We now enter the fourth block of material in 1 Corinthians: chapters 11 – 14, on corporate worship.

### Read 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

Scholars continue to debate various questions that arise from this fiendishly difficult passage. So get ready...

## Honour and shame

To most of us, the “head” is the one in charge. But the heart of Paul’s picture isn’t command and control. It’s honour and shame—like in an eastern family. The “head” is not primarily the one in charge, but the prominent one: the one whose reputation is either honoured or shamed by the actions of others.

- ❓ *In verses 3-6, what does Paul say would bring disgrace or dishonour? Who to?*

## Men and women

This might all sound arbitrary. Why should a head covering bring disgrace? Paul is arguing that there are differences between men and women, which are reflected in their appearances. Different cultures have different customs about the appearance of men and women, but it all stems from the fact that God created us as different (v 7-9).

Paul doesn’t say that only men bear the image of God, or that women are inferior. Both bear God’s image, and reflect God’s glory on

earth in complementary ways. Don’t forget that Paul is talking about what women should wear while praying and prophesying in the church—he’s not writing women off!

- ❓ *How does Paul underline the interdependence of the sexes in verses 11-12?*

## The nature of things

Paul’s final argument is based on what the Corinthians already accepted as natural. Society’s assumption was that long hair was proper for a woman but a disgrace for a man (v 13-14). Therefore it’s obvious to say that men shouldn’t have their heads covered (as if by long hair), and women should.

## Apply

How do we apply Paul’s teaching today? We need to “translate” the symbols here from the ancient Corinthian culture into our own.

Paul’s intention is to preserve appropriate distinctions between the sexes, and to avoid a sexually provocative or maritally inappropriate appearance in gathered worship. This brings glory to God, honour to both men and women, and unity to the church.

- ❓ *How might we communicate those things in our culture?*
- ❓ *In general in your relationships with the opposite sex, how can you reflect the fact that men and women are different but not independent?*

# Communion chaos

*What was the most disorganised or chaotic Christian meeting you've ever been in? What happened?*

There are a lot of ways in which our Christian meetings can be fairly disastrous. But most of us have never thought what Paul says about communion at Corinth: "Your meetings do more harm than good" (11:17)!

It reflects how serious the Lord's Supper is. This is the body and blood of Jesus. We are treading on holy ground.

## Together, apart

### Read 1 Corinthians 11:17-27

- ❓ *What's the fundamental problem in Corinth (v 18)?*
- ❓ *What's their motivation (v 19)?*

We've already seen other divisions in the Corinthian church. But in this case, division completely changes the nature of what they are doing.

- ❓ *What's happening (v 20-22)?*
- ❓ *Why is it "not the Lord's Supper" they are eating?*

## The real meaning

Paul's marvellous summary paragraph in verses 23-26 shows us what we actually do as we celebrate the Lord's Supper.

- ❓ *What do we look back to?*
- ❓ *What do we celebrate about the present?*
- ❓ *What do we look forward to in the future?*

### TIME OUT

Look back to 10:16-17.

- ❓ *What other meanings in the Lord's Supper does Paul draw out here?*

## Be warned

- ❓ *How does Paul show his disgust at what the Corinthian Christians are doing (11:17, 22, 27)?*
- ❓ *Based on Paul's description of the Lord's Supper, why do you think he was so unimpressed?*

## Apply

- ❓ *In your church, is the Lord's Supper a genuine sign of unity?*
- ❓ *How else can we express unity and make sure everyone is included when we gather as a church?*
- ❓ *What can you specifically do to help with this?*
- ❓ *What else in what Paul says in verses 23-26 do you think needs to be expressed as churches gather and eat together?*



# Two types of judgment

*Communion is meaningful and powerful, and the Corinthians are bungling it.*

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It's not surprising that what comes next is a call for repentance and a warning of judgment.

## Read 1 Corinthians 11:28-34

Paul has already said that if we take communion “in an unworthy manner”—that is, without having repented of our sin—we will be “guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord” (v 27). That sounds serious, and indeed it is.

❓ *So what does Paul call us to do (v 28)?*

This is not a call for moral perfection. It's not aimed at excluding those who have sinned. It's aimed at excluding those who do not care whether or not they have sinned.

This is what it means to discern “the body of Christ” (v 29)—to recognise that we need Jesus' death to cover our sin. As Question 81 of the Heidelberg Catechism puts it, those who should come to the Lord's Table are “those who are displeased with themselves because of their sins, but who nevertheless trust that their sins are pardoned and that their remaining weakness is covered by the suffering and death of Christ”.

❓ *If you take the Lord's Supper without repenting, what are you doing (v 29)?*

❓ *Paul clarifies what he means by that in verse 30. What judgment does he mean?*

Modern readers often find this astonishing, even shocking. Is Paul really saying that God might make a person physically

unwell, or even kill them, as an act of judgment for dishonouring him? Indeed he is.

But notice why.

❓ *What is God saving those he disciplines from (v 32)?*

## Pray

Do you think God is using the circumstances in your life to discipline you at the moment? What could he be saying to you? Spend some time in prayer, asking God to help you see your sin and turn from it.

Confess your sins and spend some time praising God for his mercy.

## Apply

Paul summarises his instructions in verses 33-34: eat together, rather than some wolfing everything down and leaving others without.

Think about how you celebrate communion in your church.

❓ *What is said beforehand?*

❓ *What do you think about as you take the bread and wine?*

❓ *How could you make sure you do this in a worthy manner—both personally and corporately?*

❓ *How else can you express your unity as a church, and the mercy and grace of God as you meet together?*

# Now about the gifts...

*It's time for Paul to deal with a fresh question from the Corinthians: what about spiritual gifts?*

- ❓ *What do you think of when you hear the phrase “spiritual gifts”?*
- ❓ *Look ahead at 1 Corinthians 12:28. Do you have experience of these things? What do you understand them to mean?*
- ❓ *How do you think we can tell whether a particular gift really comes from the Lord?*

## The first test

### Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-6

- ❓ *What's Paul's aim here (v 1)?*
- ❓ *What do the Corinthians already know (v 2)?*
- ❓ *But what else does he want them to know (v 3)?*

The acid test of whether the Holy Spirit is at work is the declaration of the lordship of Jesus. That might not be the first test we would think of. It certainly doesn't seem to be what the Corinthians thought. They were impressed by miraculous power, prophetic insight, faith that can move mountains and the languages of men and angels—and so are many of us today.

For Paul, however, the Spirit's activity is shown in a much more foundational way. If a person curses Jesus, they are not speaking by the Spirit (even if they appear to have great power). If a person declares, “Jesus is Lord,” they are speaking by the Spirit (even if they don't appear to have great power).

## Three in one

- ❓ *How do we see the unity of the Trinity in verse 3?*
- ❓ *What about in verses 4-6?*
- ❓ *What does that suggest about how we should exercise spiritual gifts?*

The Trinity collaborate together, and therefore the activity of the Spirit should not be divorced from the work of the Father and the Son. This introduces the idea that will dominate the rest of chapter 12: unity in diversity. In the world, diversity feels as if it is pulling against unity: either you remain united and squash your differences or you express your differences and break apart. In the church, it is different. Diversity serves unity, and unity celebrates diversity.

## Apply

- ❓ *Based on what Paul says in these verses, where do you think you have seen the Spirit at work recently:*
  - *in your own life?*
  - *in the lives of others around you?*
- ❓ *How do you hope the Spirit might work in the future:*
  - *in your own life?*
  - *in the lives of others around you?*



# The common good

*Father, Son and Spirit work together. So should we...*

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## Read 1 Corinthians 12:7-11

The exaltation of Jesus as Lord is the clearest sign of the Spirit's work. But another clear indication is what Paul calls "the common good" (v 7). Spiritual gifts are given for the advantage of everybody in the church. The manifestation of the Spirit is given "to each one"—including you—for the benefit of everybody. (Although the word "manifestation" is sometimes associated with weird phenomena in the contemporary church, the word here, *phanerosis*, simply refers to the Spirit's power being disclosed, exhibited and put on display.)

## Nine gifts

To show what this looks like in a congregation, Paul gives a number of examples. It's important to stress that this is not a comprehensive list of every gift the Spirit might give.

*Messages of wisdom or knowledge.* This could refer to a whole range of things. Paul might mean preaching the gospel, or the God-given ability to read a situation and speak wisely and knowledgeably into it.

*Faith.* All faith is the result of the Spirit's work, but Paul is not talking about saving faith here; that is given to all believers, not just some. More likely, he means the gift of being able to believe God for apparently impossible things.

*Gifts of healing.* Although all believers can and should pray for healing, and elders in particular are called to do so (James 5:14-16), any healing is a gift from God—not, we should note, a reward for sufficient levels of godliness, certainty or technique—which some have far more than others.

*Miraculous powers.* Paul himself clearly worked miracles (Acts 19:11-12).

*Prophecy.* This probably means supernatural insight into a specific person's circumstances. (We'll talk more about this in later studies.)

*Distinguishing between spirits.* This is the ability to tell whether something is genuinely the work of the Spirit, or whether it is demonic, or coming from the spirit of the world, or something else.

*Speaking and interpreting tongues.* This seems to refer to a special prayer-language which is used primarily to speak to God (again, we'll see more of this later).

- ❓ *Who do each of these gifts come from (v 11)?*
- ❓ *Why does one person get one gift and another person get another (v 11)?*
- ❓ *What might it look like for each of these gifts to be used "for the common good"?*

## Pray

Ask God to work in you for the common good today and this week.