

Isa. 64:1–9

Ps. 80:1–7, 17–19

1 Cor. 1:3–9

Mark 13:24–37

Words That Bless

Goal for the Session

Tweens will prepare for Christ's coming by speaking and receiving words of blessing and grace as Paul did.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on 1 Corinthians 1:3–9

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” E. Elizabeth Johnson

The letter's thanksgiving (1:4–9) telegraphs to readers at the outset the basic concerns of the writer. In this case, Paul's concerns are several related issues pertaining to the welfare of the house churches in Corinth: their charismatic giftedness (vv. 4, 7), their wealth—particularly but not only in terms of speech and knowledge (v. 5), the revelation of Christ in glory on the Day of the Lord (vv. 7, 8), and the faithfulness of the God who has called them (v. 9). Each of these subjects recurs throughout 1 Corinthians.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Carlos F. Cardoza-Orandi

This text points to one of the unique characteristics of the Christian religion: the intimate relationship between God and the Christian community that God bestows in and through Jesus Christ. Christianity gives witness to an intimate relationship among God, creation, and, in particular, the Christian community. This relationship is contextual: in other words, it takes its life and its shape from the particular terms of people's cultures. Hence, Jesus is our brother, our Lord, our ancestor, our beloved one, our enlightened spirit. Paul reasserts that the Christian community will be sustained in this spiritual continuum for one crucial reason: “God is faithful” (v. 9).

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Martin B. Copenhaver

Paul proceeds to bless the Corinthian congregation. He has some urgent matters to take up with them, but those can wait for a time. Instead, Paul begins by offering a gift of blessing. It is an offering that, in itself, reminds his readers of the bonds they share. This passage invites us to offer thanks to God, not for material gifts, but for spiritual gifts found in the church. It might also serve as a reminder that the gathered body, the body of Christ, is itself intended to be a feast of abundance laid out for the sake of the world.

NOW WHAT is God's word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Charles L. Campbell

The grace of Jesus Christ, which is the source of the community's faith and life, undercuts all divisions in the community based on human accomplishments or status. Grace here has radical social implications; it is not simply a word spoken to individuals or a power at work in individuals. Grace creates a new kind of community. Paul invites the Corinthian church—and the contemporary church—to become an odd, new people in the context of a culture divided between superior and inferior, honored and shamed, insider and outsider. The grace of Jesus Christ is the source of that new kind of community.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE
1 Corinthians 1:3–9

Focus on Your Teaching

Tweens have reached the age when peer pressure makes its presence felt. Feeling like they are part of “the group” is important. It also is the time when cliques form and teasing or bullying starts in earnest. Tweens know what it is like to receive and to speak words of criticism and judgment. This session provides an opportunity to consider what a difference it makes when God’s people focus on speaking words of blessing and grace instead.

God of love and grace, be with me as I guide this group in their exploration of your Word. Give me wisdom as I speak words of blessing and grace to each learner, and prepare their hearts to receive them. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- blue or purple cloth
- 4 votive candles
- matches, if allowed
- Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024; CD player
- Color Pack 1, 2, 33
- Color Pack 13 from Fall 2023 (optional)
- newsprint
- copies of Resource Sheets 1, 2
- envelopes (optional)
- Bibles
- highlighter pens
- pens, markers
- sticky notes

For Responding

- option 1: writing paper, pens, markers, envelopes
- option 2: napkins, pens, recipe and ingredients for treat
- option 3: *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024; CD player; art supplies

God, We Sing

God, we sing with praise
to you,
Light the flame of hope anew;
Light this candle, light the
way,
Bring hope into our hearts
today.
Jesus, near us as we pray,
Let hope be in our hearts
today.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Welcome tweens, and gather the group by playing “God, We Sing” (Color Pack 33; track 8 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024). Tell them that today begins both a new church year and season—Advent. Advent is a time of anticipation and hope as we look forward to celebrating the birth of Jesus and wait for Jesus to come again and bring God’s kingdom to its fullness.

Place the blue or purple cloth on the table and lay Color Pack 1 on top of the fabric. Arrange four votive candles on top of the candles in the picture. Use the same color of cloth and candles that your church uses for Advent worship. (Use battery-operated votives if open flames are not allowed.) Explain that the Advent wreath is round because God’s love never ends. There is one candle for each Sunday in Advent. Light the first candle. Play the song a second time, inviting the group to sing the first stanza.

Offer this prayer or one of your own:

O God of love, we are waiting and hoping for the love that is poured into the world through your Son. Be with us as we prepare our hearts for the birth of Jesus. Amen.

Extinguish the candle.

Ask tweens to list words or phrases they find encouraging. Record responses on newsprint.

Discuss:

- ✿ Which of these words or phrases is most encouraging to you? Why?
- ✿ When has another person spoken words of encouragement to you? When have you spoken an encouraging word to someone else?

Challenge tweens to watch for words of encouragement in today’s Bible reading.

EXPLORING

Review that the Christian church began shortly after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension. At first, small groups of Christians met in people's homes. Church leaders sent letters to encourage these early church communities and to offer teaching about following Jesus. Some of these letters are now part of our Bible. Today's passage comes from a letter that was written by the apostle Paul to Christians in Corinth. Show Color Pack 13 from Fall 2023 or refer to a map of Paul's journeys in a study Bible. Ask a volunteer to locate Corinth.

Tell how Paul had received a letter from someone in the Corinthian church, asking for help because the members of the church were fighting among themselves. Ask:

- ✠ If you had been the apostle Paul, what might you have said to the church in Corinth?
- ✠ If you had been a member of the church of Corinth, how might you have reacted when you heard that Paul had written a letter about what was happening in your church?

Option: To add interest, place copies of Resource Sheet 1 in envelopes and address one to each learner. Arrange for someone to deliver the letters to the group at the appropriate time.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (1 Corinthians 1:3–9). Invite volunteers to read through the letter one section at a time, allowing a moment of silence between each section. Draw attention to the footnotes at the bottom of the page, explaining that information like this is given in some Bibles to help readers understand the passage better. Read through the notes, as well as any study notes in the Bibles you are using. Ask:

- ✠ What does this letter tell you about God?
- ✠ What does this letter teach about following Jesus?

Distribute highlighter pens and invite tweens to highlight the words and phrases in the letter that they find the most encouraging. Place Color Pack 2 on the floor or tabletop and invite everyone to print some of the words or phrases they highlighted or words from the newsprint sheet in Gathering on the white notes in the picture. If you run out of space, distribute sticky notes for tweens to use and add them to the poster. Ask:

- ✠ Why do you find these particular words encouraging?

Observe that Paul had some stern words of correction to say to the Corinthian church, but he starts his letter with words of blessing and encouragement. The Corinthians probably knew that they hadn't been doing a very good job of following Jesus. They may have expected a reprimand. Instead, they first hear words of blessing and encouragement. Ask:

- ✠ What do you think about Paul's approach—beginning with words of encouragement before offering words of correction?
- ✠ How might your community be different if people followed Paul's example in pointing out the positive before addressing the negative?

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Blessing), Bibles, and pens. Have tweens work individually or in pairs to complete the resource sheet. When they finish, invite learners to read their text blessings.

EASY
PREP

Look again at the newsprint sheet from Gathering and Color Pack 2. Ask tweens to read through the words of encouragement and think about people they encounter every day. Ask: ✨ Who needs a word of blessing and encouragement from you? How might you deliver this word?

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

- 1. Letters of Blessing** Write words of blessing to one another. Distribute writing paper and pens. Have each learner write words of blessing and encouragement on the paper. Tweens can use blessings taken from the Bible or write their own. Some biblical blessings: Numbers 6:24–26; Psalm 20:1–4; Romans 15:13; Galatians 6:18; 2 Thessalonians 3:16. Some may wish to add artwork to their letters. Place each letter in an envelope and seal. During the following week, send the letters to group members. Or, during Closing, have tweens pick one to take home.
- 2. Blessing Treats** To offer a sweet blessing, choose a recipe for a treat that is easy to prepare, such as trail mix, cereal bars, or no-bake cookies. Be mindful of allergies. Have learners wash their hands and help make the treats. Write short blessings or words of encouragement on paper napkins, and wrap a treat in each one. Share them with members of the congregation during your coffee hour or fellowship time. Alternatively, you might arrange to deliver them to those members of your congregation who are homebound or go caroling at a nearby nursing home, taking the treats with you as gifts.
- 3. Contemporary Forms of Blessing** Like Paul, we can use contemporary forms of communication to offer words of blessing. Refer back to the newsprint from Gathering and Color Pack 2. Brainstorm ways to send these words to others: use a social network status update, make a computer slide show, create a piece of artwork, or compose a blessing rap. Form groups according to interest to prepare these contemporary blessings. Play a contemporary song such as “Thanksgiving Rap” (track 19 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024) as group work. Plan how these blessings will be given to others.

CLOSING

Gather around the Advent wreath and light one candle. Recall that you have heard many words of encouragement and blessing during this session. Offer this prayer:

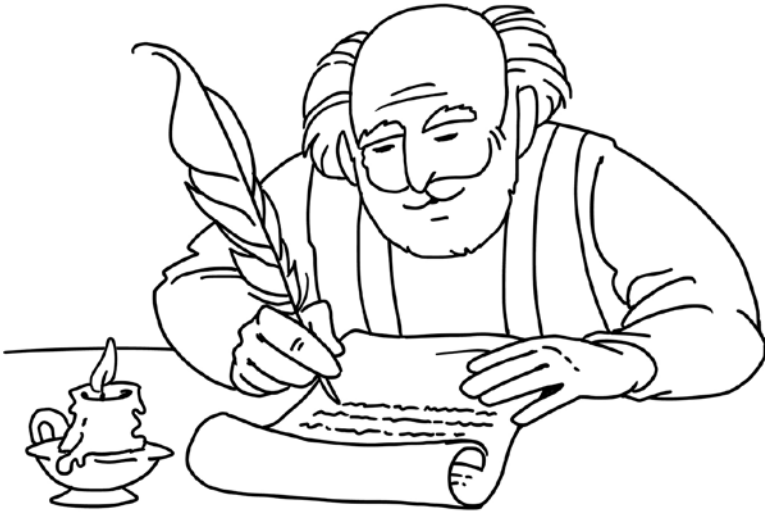
O God, your love for us is neverending. Shower us with your blessings as we show your love in our world. Amen.

Teacher: Go and reach out into the world with words of love and blessing.

All: Amen!

Extinguish the candle. Try to say a personal good-bye to each tween as the group leaves.

1 Corinthians 1:3–9



May all the gifts and benefits that come from God our Father ^a and the Master, Jesus Christ ^b, be yours.

Every time I think of you—and I think of you often!—I thank God for your lives of free and open access to God, given by Jesus. There’s no end to what has happened in you—it’s beyond speech, beyond knowledge. The evidence of Christ has been clearly verified in your lives.

Just think—you don’t need a thing, you’ve got it all! All God’s gifts are right in front of you as you wait expectantly for our Master Jesus to arrive on the scene for the Finale ^c. And not only that, but God himself is right alongside to keep you steady and on track until things are all wrapped up by Jesus. God, who got you started in this spiritual adventure, shares with us the life of his Son ^d and our Master Jesus. He will never give up on you. Never forget that.

—Scripture text only from *The Message* by Eugene H. Peterson, copyright (c) 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group. All rights reserved.

Notes:

^a At the time of Paul, it was common for people to think of God as male, even though there are also female images of God in the Bible.

^b Christ is a title given to Jesus. It means “Messiah” or “Chosen One.”

^c Like many other early Christians, Paul believed Jesus would return very soon and the world would change completely.

^d The title “Son of God” was given to the kings of Israel in the Old Testament.

Blessing

What does the word *blessing* mean? What are synonyms for blessing? Write your definitions here:

bless-ing *NOUN*

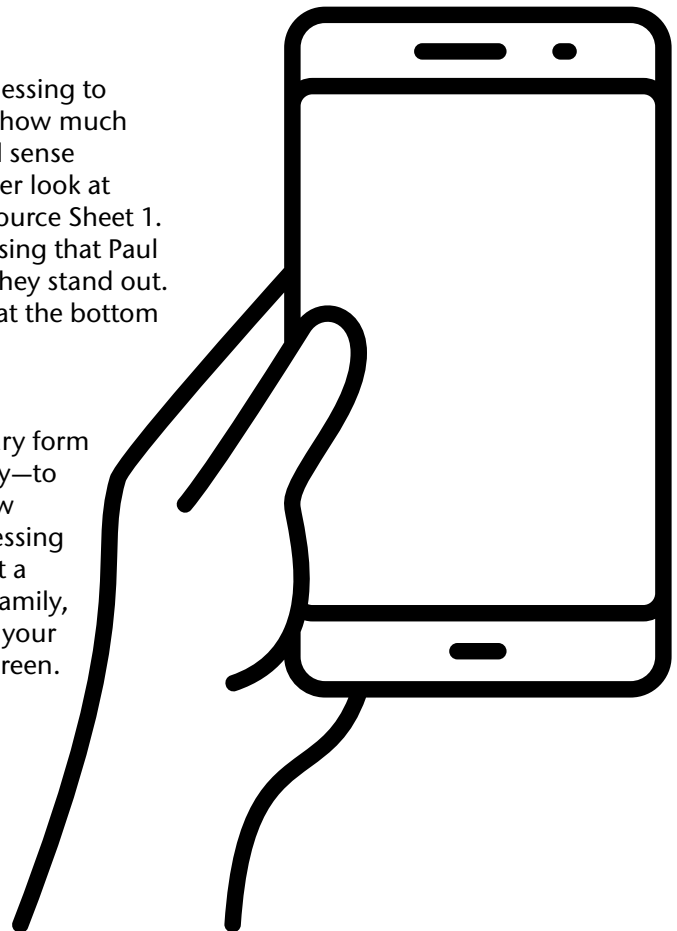
- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

In the Bible, a person is considered blessed when receiving God's gifts and God's approval. Sometimes these blessings are physical: food to eat, a place to live, a family. Other times, blessings refer to things that cannot be measured: knowing deep in your heart that God loves you even when you think you don't deserve it.

Throughout the Bible, there is a long tradition of speaking words of God's blessing to others. Go to Numbers 6:22–27 to read God's instructions for a blessing to use as part of worship.

When we speak words of blessing to others, we are telling them how much we want them to know and sense God's blessings. Take another look at 1 Corinthians 1:3–9 on Resource Sheet 1. Can you spot words of blessing that Paul wrote? Underline them so they stand out. If you are stuck, find a hint at the bottom of this page.

Paul used letters—an ordinary form of communication in his day—to offer words of blessing. How might we offer words of blessing today? If you wanted to text a blessing to your friends or family, what would you say? Write your text blessing in the blank screen.



Hint: Many blessings start with the word *may*.