

WORKING TOGETHER

by Michele Hershberger

KEY VERSE:

For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

I Cor. 3:9

FAITH STORY:

I Cor. 3:1-22

FAITH FOCUS:

Our passage today is a continuation of a theme dear to Paul's heart as he writes to the church at Corinth—unity in the church. There are divisions among them and so Paul attempts to set them straight. What does it mean to be “of the flesh”— a position no Corinthian would want to be in? It happens when people fight and quarrel. And what is the true church supposed to be like? It is like a field, and God causes the growth. It is like a building with the foundation of Jesus Christ. And when the believers are together, the church is the new temple where God's Spirit dwells.

SESSION GOAL:

To help students see the importance of living in harmony with each other in the church.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this session, the students will:

- Experience working together, and lack thereof, in an activity
- Study Paul's words about unity in the church
- Discuss how their church may struggle with unity issues

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 Bibles for all students
- 2 Copies of questions and information for students
- 3 Chalk board or dry erase board

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (5–10 minutes)

Option A:

Greet the students as they arrive, then divide them into groups of 3. Ask each group to build a structure with playing cards. The catch is this—they have to build it on an uneven surface, a moving surface, or a fragile surface. The uneven surface could be slanted or bumpy. The moving surface could be you and another leader moving the card table while they try to build. The fragile surface could be a toilet paper “table.” Let the groups work for 5 minutes, trying to build.

Option B:

Greet the students when they come in. After everyone has arrived, begin this simulation: Ask the students to work together to accomplish a task, working against another group(s). You can choose from several tasks or create a task that better fits your group. Some examples would be:

- building the highest tower out of wooden blocks
- getting a piece of masking tape as high as possible on a wall without using a chair, ladder, or any other assistance other than each other
- getting all youth in the group over a rope that is attached at each end so it's waist high

Then give special instructions to certain persons in each group. Give these instructions secretly. Use the following instructions:

- You are disagreeable no matter what. You bring disunity to the group.
- You insist that everyone has to work together as a team to get the task done.
- You claim to have a terrible stomachache.

Now, with teams chosen and special instructions given, let the teams compete.

CONNECT: (5–7 minutes)**Option A:**

Ask: *What was it like to build on a bad surface? Which group had the easiest time? How important are foundations when you're building?*

Say: *Spiritual foundations are important too. God wants us to build our gathering together, called the church, with only one foundation. God also has some other important metaphors that teach us how to really be church. Let's turn to I Cor. 3 to check these metaphors out.*

Option B:

After the first team wins, call the group together for a discussion. Ask: How did it go? Were there any problems? What would have helped the process along?

Ask the 3 people in each group to reveal their secret instructions.

Say: *it's hard to get anything done if there isn't unity, right? How hard is it to be the church without unity? And what does church unity mean? Let's turn to I Cor. 3 to see what Paul had to say about church unity.*

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (10–15 minutes)

Read the third chapter of I Corinthians together as a group. Break up the chapter this way:

- Verse 1-4
- 5-9
- 10-15

- 16-17
- 18-23

Then divide the group into 4 different groups. Give each group a copy of the questions at the end of this lesson. The questions are listed here, along with some of the answers that may be more difficult to find.

1. This group will look at verses 1-4 and answer these questions.

- What does it mean to be “of the flesh?” If people aren’t familiar with this passage, what do you think they usually say being “of the flesh” means?
- What are some examples of spiritual milk and food?
- What’s so bad about saying “I belong to Paul” or “I belong to Apollos?”

2. This group looks at 5-9 and answers these questions.

- The church is like what in these verses?
- Who plants the seeds? Who does the watering? Which job is the most important?
- Who makes the seeds grow? What is the point here?
- How do these verses respond to the problem of verse 1-4?

3. This group looks at verses 10-15 and answers these questions.

- How is the church like a building?
- Who is Paul and who is Apollos in these verses? (Apollos is the “someone else”)
- What is the foundation? What does that mean in your own words?
- Remember that the judgment in these verses is for the whole church. The people who are being judged are the leaders. What are some examples of gold and silver building materials? What are some examples of hay and stubble building materials?

The fourth group looks at verses 16-17 and answers these questions.

- In the original language of these verses, Greek, the “you” in these two verses is plural. So the verses could read like this: You all are God’s temple. So what is Paul saying? (That we together as a church are God’s temple). When people don’t know about the plural you, what do they sometime say these two verses mean (that you body is God’s temple, so don’t smoke marijuana).
- What’s the judgment in these verses? Is it too harsh? How can we destroy God’s temple (look back at verses 1-4)

Bring the groups back together and have each group share their questions and answers. **Ask:** *If we could pinpoint 4 key things Paul was trying to say to this church, what would those 4 things be? Make a list on a chalkboard or dry erase board.*

APPLY: (10 minutes)

As a whole group, list the issues your congregation might quarrel about. (This could lead to lively discussion!)

Ask: *For the issues we've listed, how does a foundation of Christ crucified help us know what to do about them?*

Hopefully the group will see how Jesus and the cross can help us love each other despite disagreements. Do any of these issues take your church away from Jesus? Don't be afraid to talk about potentially tough issues. Many youth long to discuss these things and want to deal with the difficult paradox of right theology and grace for differences.

RESPOND: (5–10 minutes)

Going back to the image of the foundation, ask students to build a "people temple." Choose a solid piece of ground, either outside or the floor of your meeting room. Talk about how important it is to have a foundation that is even and level and firm. That is Jesus. Then link yourselves together, putting your arms on the shoulders of the person on either side of you and make a tight circle. Close with prayer, asking someone to pray for each pastor and church leader. Have someone else pray for the tough issues your church faces. Have another person pray for each one present.

INSIGHTS FROM SCRIPTURE:

Make these points:

- Usually we think being "of the flesh" has something to do with sex. Paul is clear, in this passage, that it has to do with quarreling, even religious quarreling. The word jealousy in verse 3 means religious jealousy.
- In that day Greek philosophers would have compared immature people to infants, just like Paul is doing here. They also used the milk and solid food images
- Paul then compares the church to 3 things. The field metaphor stresses that no leaders in the church are more important than any other, because only God can make plants grow.
- The building metaphor shows us the importance of the right foundation—Christ. It also shows us that leaders have a great responsibility to build the church with the right materials—things that truly matter.
- The third metaphor is often misunderstood. Many preachers have preached on this passage, using it to preach against smoking and overeating. Those are bad habits, but that's not what Paul is talking about here (although he does make this statement in chapter 6). Here the local body of believers, when they are together, is the temple of God's Holy Spirit. We can actually destroy God's temple by our quarreling.
- It's amazing that Paul, a devout Jew, would be so transformed by Jesus that he could call a group of mostly Gentile Christians, the new temple of God!

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORE THE BIBLE:

GROUP 1

READ VERSES 1-4 and answer these questions.

- What does it mean to be “of the flesh?” If you aren’t familiar with this passage, what do you think being “of the flesh” means?
- What are some examples of spiritual milk and food?
- What’s so bad about saying “I belong to Paul” or “I belong to Apollos?”

GROUP 2

READ VERSES 5-9 and answer these questions.

- The church is like what in these verses?
- Who plants the seeds? Who does the watering? Which job is the most important?
- Who makes the seeds grow? What is the point here?
- How do these verses respond to the problem of verse 1-4?

GROUP 3

READ VERSES 10-15 and answer these questions.

- How is the church like a building?
- Who is Paul and who is Apollos in these verses?
- What is the foundation? What does that mean in your own words?
- Remember that the judgment in these verses is for the whole church. The people who are being judged are the leaders. What are some examples of gold and silver building materials? What are some examples of hay and stubble building materials?

GROUP 4

READ VERSES 16-17 and answer these questions.

- In the original language of these verses, Greek, the “you” in these two verses is plural. So the verses could read like this: You all are God’s temple. So what is Paul saying? When people don’t know about the plural you, what do they sometime say these two verses mean?
- What’s the judgment in these verses? Is it too harsh? How can we destroy God’s temple? (look back at verses 1-4)