



Stories of the
New Testament



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Our Mission:

At Youth Ministry Conversations, we believe you know your group best. This means our resources look a little different than what you may have experienced in the past. We try and create a “buffet” of material so you can choose and pick what works best for your group. You will find ideas, instructions, and possibilities in this packet all related to the theme of “The Stories of the New Testament.” How you use them, and how you structure your study is up to you. We hope you enjoy this resource and return in the future to check out other materials.

This Study:

Stories of the New Testament: Sometimes it seems easier to just stick with the classics, but whether it is looking at a familiar story from a new angle or visiting a story that’s often overlooked, it’s worth exploring new territory as a way to stretch and grow. Each story in this series begins with a look at the document (book of the bible) where the story is found to give context and the big picture. From there the story provides a message applicable to our lives today.

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The Writer:



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The Story of a Community Choosing Sides

Focus: Reconciliation & peace in the midst of diversity

Scripture:

- 1st Corinthians 1:10-18

Supplies:

- Bibles
- Index Cards
- Paper/Markers

Background on scripture and topic:

Deep Background: 1 Corinthians - Even though 1 Corinthians is about in the middle of our New Testament, it was one of the earliest New Testament documents written. It came before all four of the gospels and well before Acts. Also, even though we call it First Corinthians, it is not the first letter Paul wrote to this community. He refers to a previous letter in First Corinthians 5:9. Much of the letter addresses conflicts in the community, and he also answers questions that have been sent to him. But, "On the whole, 1 Corinthians is not primarily a conflict letter. Its tone includes affection and tenderness as well as passages remarkable for their profundity, insight, and beauty." (Borg p. 61)

At first glance, this passage might not seem like a Bible "story." It's actually a complicated story of misplaced priorities and personal pride. The Christian community in Corinth was divided by their loyalties, divided over spiritual gifts, (chapters 12-14) and divided between "the rich" and "the rest." (Borg p. 58)

Paul explains not only the importance of moving beyond these divisions, he gives us a way.

*You must be **united** in the same mind and the **same purpose**.* So, what is this purpose Christians should have in common? Our purpose is to live our lives and to help others live their lives as followers of Jesus. If we have that common purpose we don't have to be in lock step. With this purpose there is room for particular understandings and life/faith stages.

The key is to not let those differences divide us from each other and distract us from our common purpose. Paul called for no divisions. An absence of divisions comes from living in relationship with Christ. An absence of divisions leads to unity and Paul calls for unity, “because that’s the purpose of God’s work in Christ, reconciliation and peace.” (Feasting p. 278)

After making his point regarding purpose and unity, Paul brings up the cross because the cross is central to the idea of uniting behind the same purpose.

The theology of the cross is important because it “not only shapes our response to the needs of others but equally shapes how we should listen and not rush to judgment, how we may discern what to do, and in what spirit we may make decisions and undertake actions.”(Feasting p. 280)

Obviously, youth are just beginning to move toward a deeper understanding of the cross and for most of us, it’s a lifetime process. But this story provides a great start. It’s a way to connect our day to day lives and priorities with the theology of the cross. Here is the key:

A ‘theology of the cross’ (theologia crucis) in this sense contradicts the assumptions we normally have about life. It says that God is most reliably present not in our strengths or our successes or the things we like best about ourselves. Rather, God is present and working in the world exactly in the place where a person is falling apart, where they are discovering the limits of their power instead of its possibilities. It also means that God is always involved with people and situations exactly as they currently are, instead of as they could be or might be or used to be.

The New Testament is shot through with the theme of ‘theology of the cross’. In addition to the crucifixion itself, we see it in Jesus’ preference for sinners, outcasts, and hypocrites, in his humble and unexpected origins, and in his teaching that the first shall be last and the last shall be first (Matt. 20:16; Luke 13:30). It is also present particularly in St. Paul’s reflections on wisdom, and foolishness, and the message of ‘Christ crucified’ in 1 Cor. 1, and his insight that God’s power ‘is made perfect in weakness’ (2 Cor. 12:9).

<http://www.mbird.com/glossary/theology-of-the-cross/>

The cross represents the strength in weakness that Jesus demonstrated. That is the common purpose that unites us. Youth know a great deal about division. They see it in politics, popular culture (Team Kanye v Team Taylor), or The Hunger Games (Team Peeta v Team Gale), and personally. From the grade school playground on up, they have experienced a form of “I’m not going to be your friend if you're friends with her.”

Parent email prompt:

Even if you haven't heard of Team Kanye v Team Taylor, or Team Peeta v Team Gale, there's a good chance your teenagers have. It seems like everything is a competition. Does it really have to be that way? Is that God's plan? We will study the backstory of 1 Corinthians 1 to find out Paul's answer to that question.

Text Prompt the night before:

Why does everything have to be a competition? Or does it? Come tomorrow night as we dive in to the first of our Stories of the New Testament

Game: We are the best!

Count how many students you have, and divide that number by 3 (4 or 5 if you have a very large group). For instance, if you have 12 students, you would count off 1,2,3,4, 1,2,3,4, and 1,2,3,4 and have the Ones form a team, etc.

Once the teams are formed, tell them to begin a discussion with the other teams about why their team is the best. Do not give them a context for figuring out what best looks like. Decide if you want to do this as a free for all (no moderator) or if you want to moderate based on the typical behavior of your group.

Large Group discussion questions:

- Was it obvious who had the best group?
- Was it hard to convince people your group was the best? Why?
- When there is a non-athletic competition, how do you choose who you support?
- How often do you think, "I don't care"? Are you sometimes surprised by other people's passion?
- Have you noticed, does competition cross into the church? Or is it something that you only see in "the world?"
- Can you name any examples in the church?
- Whether you have noticed it or not, the competition doesn't stop at the threshold of the church. If it's everywhere else, is it a problem for Christians to have divisions?

Scripture Reading:

Have a student read aloud verses 10-12 (from the message) substituting the names of the team captains from the previous activity for “Paul”, “Apollos,” “Peter” & “the Messiah”

10 I have a serious concern to bring up with you, my friends, using the authority of Jesus, our Master. I'll put it as urgently as I can: **You *must* get along with each other. You must learn to be considerate of one another, cultivating a life in common.**

11-12 I bring this up because some from Chloe's family brought a most disturbing report to my attention—that you're fighting among yourselves! I'll tell you exactly what I was told: You're all picking sides, going around saying, “I'm on _____'s side,” or “I'm for _____,” or “_____ is my man,” or “I'm in the _____ group.”

18-21 The Message that points to Christ on the Cross seems like sheer silliness to those hell-bent on destruction, but for those on the way of salvation it makes perfect sense.

[The Message](#) (MSG)

Small group activity: Pair up

- Pair up and discuss the following questions:
- Why should Christians be united?
- Can you be united and have different opinions?
- Have you noticed how often no matter what someone does and no matter how many people admire them, other people will be critical? Why do you think that is?
- Have you ever had a parent or a teacher say, “You need to quit fighting and get along.”? How did that work out?
- Does being united mean you have to agree on everything? Does it help?
- Paul says *brothers and sisters*. Are you able to accept differences within your family? Are you able to accept a family member even if you don't agree about an issue?
- Paul says we need to have the same purpose and that is what unites us. Have you given any thought to your purpose?
- Do we usually think of purpose in terms of group purpose or individual purpose? Is there a difference?

Small group discussion:

The passage ends with Paul mentioning the importance of the power of the cross of Christ. Before asking the small group questions explain the points made in the Background section regarding The Theology of the Cross

- * God is most present not in our strengths or successes but in the places where we are falling apart, failing. Where we are discovering the limits of our power.
- * God is always involved with people where they currently are. Not where they could be or have been.
- * God's power is made perfect in weakness.
- What do these points have to do with the cross?
- What do they have to do with finding unity through the common purpose of reconciliation and peace?

If it's appropriate, have an honest discussion regarding what's getting in the way of the unity and the common purpose of reconciliation and peace within the group.

Prayer Time:

Use the same groups from the first activity and assign them an area of life that can be divisive. Family, Friends, Politics, Racial Tension, etc. Have each group write a prayer for unity within that realm.

Tangible Item they leave with:

Give each student a card to place somewhere that they will see it each day.

You must get along with each other.
You must learn to be considerate of one another,
cultivating a life in common.
1 Corinthians 1:10b

Remind Youth:

Our common purpose is Christ and Christ's love. Help us approach those who differ with us in a spirit of "care and compassion and love." (Feasting p. 281)