



UPSTATE GROUP GUIDE

Through the Bible

December 1-7

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Things to Know

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Gospel Connections and Conversations

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*Studying God's Word **In Community***

*Reminder: Seek to understand and apply God's word, **not** rehash the sermon.*

Sermon Recap

1. Message Over Messenger

Paul deliberately rejected the polished, applause-seeking style of the Second Sophistic orators so the Corinthians would see Christ—not Paul. The preacher is not the power of salvation; the gospel is. (1 Cor. 2:1–2)

2. Power Over Presentation

Paul's weakness, fear, and trembling were not obstacles to ministry but the very platform through which God displayed His power. The Spirit—not rhetorical excellence—creates lasting faith. (1 Cor. 2:3–5)

3. Faith Must Rest on God, Not Man

If faith is built on persuasive personalities or impressive delivery, it will fail. But when it is grounded in the Spirit's power and the message of the cross, it endures every trial, doubt, and cultural shift. (1 Cor. 2:5)

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think the Corinthians were drawn to impressive speakers? How does our culture show similar tendencies today?
 2. Paul says he resolved to know nothing except Christ and Him crucified. What does it look like for a church—or a believer—to make that the center of life and ministry?
 3. How does Paul's confession of weakness, fear, and trembling challenge our assumptions about what effective ministry should look like?
 4. What dangers arise when faith is built on a preacher's personality, style, or skill instead of the message of the gospel?
 5. Where in your own walk do you tend to rely on personal strength or "presentation" instead of the power of the Holy Spirit?
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Read

Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 and make observations about the text.

- What is God teaching us in the passage?
 - What does this reveal about who God is, what God has done, and how I should respond?
 - Which part of the text was most meaningful to you and why?
 - What do you need help understanding about this passage?
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Scripture

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Proclaiming Christ Crucified

2 And I, when I came to you, brothers,[a] did not come proclaiming to you the testimony[b] of God with lofty speech or wisdom. **2** For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. **3** And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, **4** and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, **5** so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men[c] but in the power of God.

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1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Living on Mission In Community

Paul's words remind us that everything in the Christian life depends on what God has done, not on what we can perform. We are tempted to judge leaders by charisma, measure spiritual success by outward polish, and pursue a version of Christianity that looks impressive instead of powerful. But God delights to work through ordinary voices, trembling hands, and humble hearts so that the world sees Christ rather than human ability. The call for us is to shift our confidence away from presentation and back toward the power of the crucified and risen Savior, trusting the Spirit to do what only He can do. Where do you need to intentionally move your confidence from human strength to God's power this week?

How is God leading me to respond to His Word this week?

Optional Breakout Questions

Consider making time at the end of the group to break out into groups of 2-4 (keep them gender specific). Have them answer these three questions about their weeks:

1. How did you feed yourself?
 - (What have you been doing to feed your spiritual life, and how is it going?)
2. How did you feed others?

- *(How did you share the gospel or gospel truth with someone this week?)*

3. How did you feed your flesh?

- *(What sins did you struggle with this week? How can your friends hold you accountable?)*

Leader Resources - Dec 1 - 7

Small Group Curriculum - 1 Corinthians 2:1–5 — “Christ, Not Cleverness”

1. SESSION OVERVIEW

Paul writes to a church obsessed with eloquent teachers, flashy rhetoric, and human-centered displays of wisdom. Into this environment—one that looks strikingly like ours—Paul reminds them that true power is not found in impressive personalities, strategic communication, or polished presentations. It is found in the cross-shaped proclamation of the gospel, delivered in human weakness and attended by the power of the Holy Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 2:1–5, Paul gives us his philosophy of ministry: a ministry centered on Christ crucified, characterized by weakness, and empowered by the Spirit, so that faith rests not on human ingenuity but on God alone.

This passage confronts our fascination with “the wise,” “the gifted,” and “the influential,” and calls us back to a ministry shaped by the foolishness of the cross, the humility of the servant, and the power of the Spirit.

2. OPENING (PRAYER + ICEBREAKER)

Icebreaker Question:

What is one place in your life where you feel pressure to appear competent, polished, or impressive? Why is that pressure so strong?

Deeper Community (2–3 people):

Break briefly into triads. Encourage honest sharing using a question that promotes spiritual vulnerability:

“Is there any way we can pray for your walk with God this week—especially in an area where you feel weak or insufficient?”

Opening Prayer:

Father, quiet our hearts from the noise of self-reliance. Help us embrace the simplicity and power of Christ crucified. Make us a people who trust Your power more than our performance, Your wisdom more than our own. Amen.

3. SCRIPTURE READING: 1 Corinthians 2:1–5

Have someone read the passage slowly.

4. Teaching Points (Systematic Walkthrough)

Teaching Point 1: The Gospel Does Not Need Human Enhancement (v. 1)

Paul begins by reminding the Corinthians how he came to them: “not with lofty speech or wisdom.”

In Corinth—a city drenched in celebrity orators and the polished theatrics of the Second Sophistic—Paul stands in deliberate contrast.

- This was not anti-intellectual laziness.
- It was a theological decision: Paul refused to dress up the gospel with techniques that would shift attention away from Christ.

Paul’s approach models the truth that the gospel is powerful precisely because it is God’s revelation, not human speculation. To rely on rhetorical showmanship was to obscure the message behind the messenger.

Theological Insight:

Christian ministry is fundamentally about bearing witness to what God has done—not showcasing what humans can do.

Pastoral Insight:

Churches today are still tempted to measure faithfulness by excellence, polish, and public momentum rather than by the clear proclamation of Christ.

Teaching Point 2: Christ Crucified Is the Center of All Christian Ministry (v. 2)

Paul's resolution is astonishing:

"I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

This does not mean Paul knew nothing else, nor that he only repeated the crucifixion. It means:

- Christ crucified is the interpretive center of everything he teaches.
- The cross is not merely the entry point to Christianity; it is the controlling center of preaching, discipleship, and spiritual growth.
- All doctrine, ethics, and spiritual formation flow out of the redemptive work of Christ.

Theological Insight:

The cross is not one doctrine among many—it is the blazing, central sun around which all Christian truth orbits.

Pastoral Insight:

When churches drift from cross-centered preaching, they inevitably drift toward self-help, moralism, or political ideology.

Teaching Point 3: God Works Through Human Weakness, Not Human Impressiveness (v. 3)

Paul came to Corinth "in weakness and in fear and much trembling." This is not a confession of cowardice—it is a confession of dependence.

Weakness:

- strips us of self-confidence
- opens us to God's power
- keeps us from stealing God's glory

- reveals that spiritual fruit is God's work, not ours

Paul is intentionally modeling the crucifixion-shaped posture of Christian ministry: power through weakness.

Theological Insight:

God displays His strength most clearly in the places where His servants feel most insufficient.

Pastoral Insight:

This comforts ordinary believers: the Christian life is not one long performance of competence, but a long dependence on the Spirit.

Teaching Point 4: The Spirit Accomplishes What Human Technique Cannot (vv. 4–5)

Paul rejects “persuasive words of wisdom”—the polished, performative rhetoric of the Greek sophists. Instead, his preaching came “in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.”

Paul's point is not that his sermons were emotionally dull or rhetorically sloppy. It is this:

True faith does not originate in the brilliance of the messenger but in the power of the Spirit.

Faith built on human charisma will crumble.

Faith built on God's power will endure.

Theological Insight:

The Holy Spirit is the decisive agent in salvation and transformation. Human skill may gather a crowd; only the Spirit can convert a heart.

Pastoral Insight:

Churches must resist relying on personality-driven ministry. The aim is not to impress but to bear witness.

5. Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think the Corinthians were so drawn to eloquent, impressive leaders? What similarities do you see in modern church culture?
2. What would it look like for our church to embody a ministry centered on “Christ and Him crucified” rather than personal charisma or cleverness?
3. Where do you personally feel tempted to rely on your own abilities rather than the Spirit’s power?
4. Paul admits he came in weakness. How might embracing weakness grow your dependence on God?
5. What does it mean for faith to rest “not on human wisdom but on the power of God”? How does this shape the way you share the gospel?

6. Application

In a world obsessed with confidence, competence, and charisma, Paul calls us to a radically countercultural way of life: a life that embraces weakness, clings to Christ, and depends on the Spirit. The Christian life is not a performance of perfection but a posture of dependence. The cross reorders our values, redefines our strength, and redirects our confidence. Christ crucified frees us from the exhausting need to be impressive.

Final Heart Question:

Where is God inviting you to renounce self-reliance and actively rest your faith on His power this week?

7. Closing Reflection & Prayer

Reflect silently:

Where have I relied too much on human wisdom—my own ideas, abilities, or strengths—instead of the power of God?

Closing Prayer:

Lord, teach us to live cross-shaped lives. Free us from the need to be impressive. Fill us with the power of the Holy Spirit. And make Jesus Christ the center of everything we do—in our homes, in our relationships, and in our church. Amen.

8. Memory Verse

1 Corinthians 2:2

“For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”

9. Leader’s Notes

- Keep the focus on Christ, not teaching technique. Resist over-intellectualizing; make space for the Spirit.
- Guard the conversation from drifting into personalities (favorite preachers, podcast pastors, etc.). Keep bringing the group back to “Christ and Him crucified.”
- Encourage vulnerability. Paul models weakness; small groups should be a safe place to admit weakness.
- Point out modern versions of “lofty speech.” This may include celebrity culture, platform building, or ministry performance.
- End on hope, not guilt. Weakness is not a shame to hide.