



*Jen Buck*

I am an assistant professor of Practical Theology at Azusa Pacific University. I earned my PhD in Philosophy of Religion and Theology from Claremont Graduate University and my MDiv from Fuller Seminary. My first book, *Reframing the House*, on third world feminist theology, is forthcoming this year. I served for eight years on the pastoral staff at Rose Drive Friends Church and still participate by preaching, teaching, and leading worship. My scholarly interests are Quakerism, peacemaking, feminism, and global Christianity. I have served, explored, or lived in over thirty countries and enjoy hiking, running, cooking, and reading. I live with my husband, Adam, a social justice documentary filmmaker, and our two dogs and three cats.

*BIBLE READING: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 (MSG)*

This week we are going to immerse ourselves in some of Paul's writings to the church in Corinth. 1 Corinthians 1:18 serves as Paul's thesis for the entire book—that the wisdom of the cross is foolishness to the world, but that to Christians it is the power of God. Eugene Peterson gives language to this idea in *The Message* paraphrase by saying that the message of the cross makes “perfect sense.” Christ is God's wisdom in human form—and Jesus of Nazareth confounds the world's wisdom over and over again. As Christians, we are invited to be the kind of people who continue to follow God's wisdom, not the world's wisdom, and to discern together what that might look like. The example Paul gives is that God chose the unlikely—unlikely ways and unlikely people—not as an afterthought or plan B, but as the exact way that the gospel works. The good news is that the way God works is often a role reversal. God deliberately chooses over and over again the women and men that the world overlooks, the “nobodies.”

The natural question for us today is who are the unlikely and overlooked in our society today? And with that, how does God use them in ways we might miss out on if we overlook them? The unlikely people of today may very well be the ones God wants to use to teach and lead the church by showing us what true wisdom looks like.

*SONG: Be Thou My Vision*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: O true Wisdom, help us understand the wisdom of your cross. We confess the times when we follow the world's wisdom instead of calling it out as foolishness. Help us to look for unlikely teachers to illuminate your wisdom for us.*

—Jen Buck

*BIBLE READING: 1 Corinthians 2:1-16 (MSG)*

Paul himself begins this letter by reminding the believers in Corinth that he does not preach or teach in his own human wisdom and he comes with weakness, fear, and trembling. This very vulnerable, human confession gives us a glimpse at how monumental God's wisdom is to Paul. The bottom line for Paul is that nothing matters except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

And isn't that the key component of Christianity for all of us? Everything in our lives comes down to Jesus Christ. Many of us find seasons when we come to the end of ourselves—the end of our own human wisdom—and we must depend on the mystery of the power of God working in us. If we believe that Christ is living and real, then this is the only thing that matters, the only thing that can truly save us, and the only true confidence we have. God's true wisdom comes through our human selves anyway, despite our fears and our inadequacies. God's wisdom was made plain for us in Christ, and Paul reminds us that we have the mind of Christ, or God's Spirit, living in us today. Just as Elisha says in 2 Kings 6:16, "those who are with us are more than those who are with them," so in the words of Paul we are reminded that the living God is greater than anything of this world. In our moments of weakness, God is alive and at work within us, and that is the source of true power and wisdom.

*SONG: Lord, I Want to Be a Christian*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Christ, you are the only thing that matters in this life. Thank you that you work through us even when we feel weak.*

—Jen Buck

*BIBLE READING: 1 Corinthians 4:1-13 (MSG)*

As the letter develops, Paul reminds the Corinthian congregation of who they are in Christ and what Christ has done for them. Like a father, Paul views these believers as his children, and he desires for them to live an empowered life. He stresses that they already have all they want in Christ, and Paul sees his role as one to help them grow as believers. One of the metaphors Paul uses for himself and the other apostles is a “fool for Christ,” or as *The Message* paraphrases it, “the Messiah’s misfits.” Paul wants the Christians in Corinth to begin to view their identity in the same way that he and the other church leaders do and to imitate their mature faith.

As we grow in the wisdom of God, we start to better understand that the world’s success, prestige, and provision are not what truly matters. Followers of Christ are “treated like [the] garbage” of this world, a people who don’t belong. True success in following Jesus looks like lives lived fully in God’s power, and that looks like foolish choices to the world. We are to be those who bless when reviled, which echoes Jesus’ instruction to his followers to love their enemies. Loving enemies seems foolish when the world tells us to conquer enemies. This may make us misfits, but we’ll be the Messiah’s misfits.

*SONG: He Leadeth Me*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: God, help us to do the hardest possible thing: to love our enemies. Give us the courage to worry less about success in the world’s eyes and to be unafraid to be foolish for you.*

—Jen Buck

*BIBLE READING: 1 Corinthians 9:1-18 (MSG)*

Paul wants the believers in Corinth to begin to understand their identity as completely free in Christ. He himself understands the gospel as freely given and freely received, and that in response, we as followers of Christ are to live freely. Paul's defense to his critics is that the believers in Corinth are examples of this freedom. He walks firmly in his calling that the gospel guides all of his vocation. Paul uses his life as an example of how he invested his freedom. Our freedom is to be used not to take advantage of others, but to invest in others. Paul chose voluntary service for the sake of the gospel and he invites us to do likewise. He viewed his life as one in which he gave all for the gospel, and at the end of his life he wants there to be nothing but a fully completed race. One step further, this freedom for Paul is not a burden but a joy. *The Message* calls Paul's work his "pleasure" in proclaiming the gospel.

Throughout our days, we are challenged to think about how we use our freedom for others and to see this freedom as a joy. How are we using our freedom to demonstrate the radical nature of the gospel? Too often all of us use our freedom in ways that have no real significance, or worse, actually hinder the freedom of others. Whether it is by our words, our time, or our purchases, we are invited to invest our freedom as wisely as we can.

*SONG: Take My Life and Let It Be*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: God, help us to truly grasp the freedom you give us in Christ. Guide us better than we know to use that freedom for your gospel.*

—Jen Buck

*BIBLE READING: 1 Corinthians 12:12-21 (MSG)*

Paul shifts the focus of his letter to address divisions in the church, particularly over worship practices and spiritual gifts. The beautiful metaphor he gives us is that of a living being, full of a variety of parts that are all necessary. For believers, every single life matters and makes a contribution to the body. Not a single person is trash. Taking this one step further, every person is to depend on others and be interconnected as one unit. Paul declares that this body is complete and whole, but the problem he addresses is that we often want to prioritize certain parts of the body over other parts. The world would say that certain gifts lead to greater success or have more value or gain more status. Instead, Paul invites the believers in Corinth into a “more excellent way,” a way that takes the weakest and cherishes them most. If one is hurting, all will be hurting, and if one part is thriving, all are thriving. Previously, our old labels gave us identity—Paul’s examples are slave, free, Jew, and Greek—but now we are invited to something greater and more comprehensive: Christian.

Today we could use labels like conservative or liberal, documented or undocumented, but God invites us to enter into a life greater than any of our previous roles. If we are a part of the body of believers, our lives are to be deeply united with all Christians, refreshed and sustained by God’s spirit.

*SONG: Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: God, unite me with other believers. Help me to follow your more excellent way and break down the barriers that keep us from being one body.*

—Jen Buck

*BIBLE READING: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 (MSG)*

Here we find the most famous passage in 1 Corinthians, the chapter on Christian love. This passage finds its way into marriage ceremonies and discussions of romantic love, and, yes, Christians are to love their spouses with Christ-like, sacrificial love. But this passage is intended to help the Corinthian church to overcome their divisions.

After teaching on order in worship and spiritual gifts, Paul reminds the Corinthian believers that none of it matters without Christian love. Without love, we get nowhere, and as *The Message* paraphrase asserts, we are “bankrupt” without it. What a helpful analogy to think of love as a currency. Our gifts are like maxed-out credit cards without love. We can hold the cards in our wallet, but without the true currency behind it, it doesn’t matter.

Too often within our churches, our human selves come through and we want to keep score; we find our heads swelling up, and we struggle to keep from putting our own desires first. Paul helps us remember what God’s true love looks like with the analogy of looking through foggy glass. We cannot see everything fully yet, but as we move toward God’s good completion we are to be a people of love. Paul’s letter to the Corinthians reminds us that God uses the weak to show his strength, as we talked about on previous days. Now we see that God doesn’t look for perfection, but instead, for the way of love.

*SONG: They’ll Know We Are Christians by Our Love*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: God, teach us the ways of your true love, and teach us to love one another generously.*

—Jen Buck

*BIBLE READING: 1 Corinthians 15:35-58 (MSG)*

Paul wraps up his letter with a discussion on the resurrection of the dead and the resurrected body. The Corinthian church appears to be looking for some sort of formula or diagram for what this will look like, but instead, Paul invites them into a mystery. “We will not all die but we will all be changed” he writes in verse 51, and he ends with the triumphant hope of death swallowed up in victory through Jesus Christ. Sin and guilt and death have been overcome—the reality of resurrection that we can experience today. Instead of answers to specific minutia, we are given an overarching theology of hope.

Out of this reality we are invited to be a people who live firmly and confidently in the gospel, knowing that we can hold nothing back because none of our work is wasted. The great story of Scripture reminds us that nothing done for God goes to waste, and in fact, example after example and season after season tell of God’s redemption of brokenness. And as we look to our future hope, we can continue to hold this truth as an anchor: God is working through our broken churches with the power of Jesus Christ for the redemption of the world. As the letter to the Corinthians ends, they are reminded of the great day when all will end but no labor will be in vain. May we live as hope-filled resurrection people today.

*SONG: Thanks Be to Our God*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: For all you have done, O God, and all you will continue to do until the great day, we give you thanks.*

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