

1 CORINTHIANS

Remember Who We Are





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EXPLORE THE BIBLE: 1 Corinthians—Remember Who You Are

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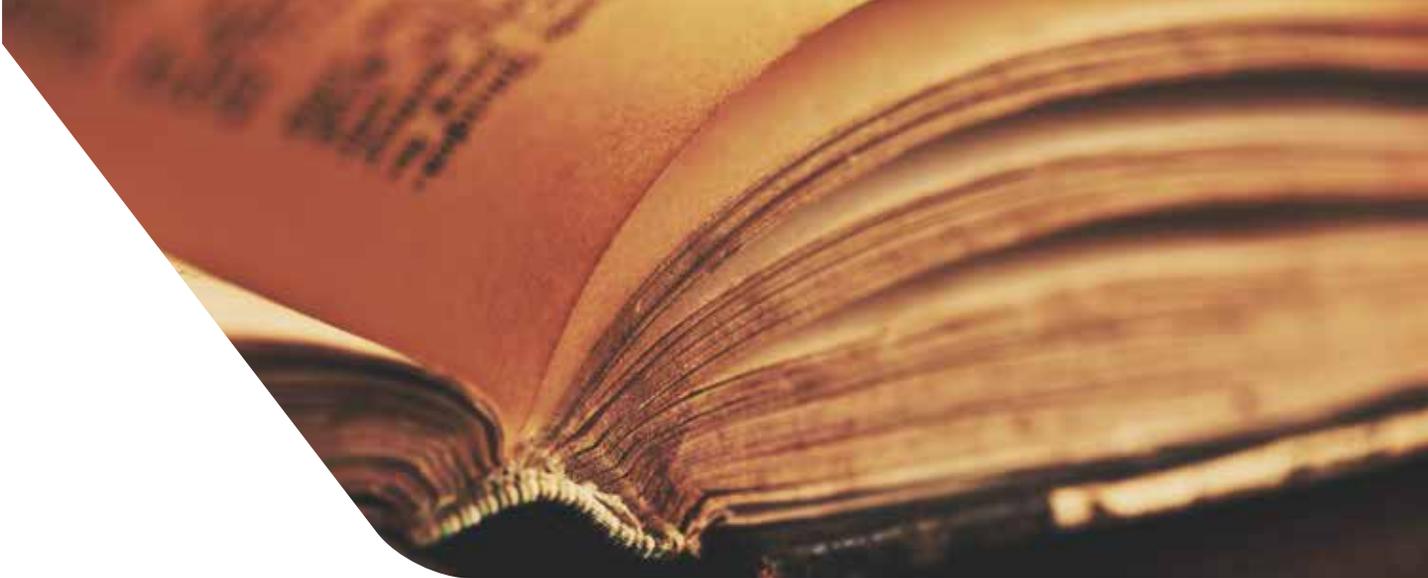
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We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review LifeWay's doctrinal guideline, please visit lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline.

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ABOUT THIS STUDY

Passionate. Powerful. Purposeful. These three terms are accurate, comprehensive descriptors of Paul's letters to the Corinthian church. Both letters contain passionate responses to doctrinal and practical matters that needed attention. Each section, chapter, and verse is purposeful by design, addressing those issues with sound theology, keen insight, and gospel-centeredness. Without a doubt, the Corinthian correspondence reveals a powerful presentation of gospel truths and applications, ably written in argument and clarity.

This Bible study will focus on 1 Corinthians. Key themes of this letter include Christian unity, sexual morality, women's roles, spiritual gifts, and the resurrection.

The **Explore the Bible** series will help you know and apply the encouraging and empowering truth of God's Word. Each session is organized in the following way.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT: This page explains the original circumstances and setting of the session's focal passage and identifies the primary themes.

EXPLORE THE TEXT: This page introduces the session's Bible passage, providing helpful commentary and encouraging thoughtful interaction with God through His Word.

APPLY THE TEXT: This page helps you and your group members apply the truths you've explored. It's not enough to know what the Bible says. God's Word has the power to change your life.

DAILY EXPLORATION: Go deeper into God's Word, building on the group experience. Engage in these daily Bible studies, reflect on the questions, record your thoughts, and take action.

OBEY THE TEXT: These pages provide opportunities to obey the Scriptures you've studied by responding to questions, memorizing verses, journaling, and praying.

LEADER GUIDE: This final section provides discussion starters and suggested questions to help someone lead a group study.



GENERAL EDITOR

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ABOUT 1 CORINTHIANS

The church has never been perfect. Only the Lord of the church is perfect, a truth that's abundantly clear in 1 Corinthians. Here we find the gospel in all its glory and life with all its complexities. The Book of Ecclesiastes says, "There is nothing new under the sun" (1:9), and Paul's letter to the church in Corinth illustrates that truth. Paul wrote to a people who loved Christ but who struggled with divisions of all kinds, manifold rebellion, and downright immorality. When we read and study this book, we're reminded that although Jesus is Lord of the church, there's no perfect church.

Even still, in 1 Corinthians we learn the centrality of the cross, the meaning of marriage, the danger of lust, and the way a church should be structured. We learn the importance of spiritual gifts, the value of diversity, and the joy of taking the Lord's Supper.

Paul's letter to the Corinthian church grounds us in the gospel of Christ and fills us with resurrection hope. And this hope doesn't disappoint. This hope gives us strength for endurance so that in our struggles we don't lose heart.

First Corinthians serves as a banquet table of gospel truth, served up for the strength and health of God's people. At this critical hour an intense and thorough study of this book is sure to bring nourishment to the famished soul and strength to any gospel-centered church.

As you study 1 Corinthians, may the Spirit of God use the Word of God to anchor your confidence and hope in the Son of God.



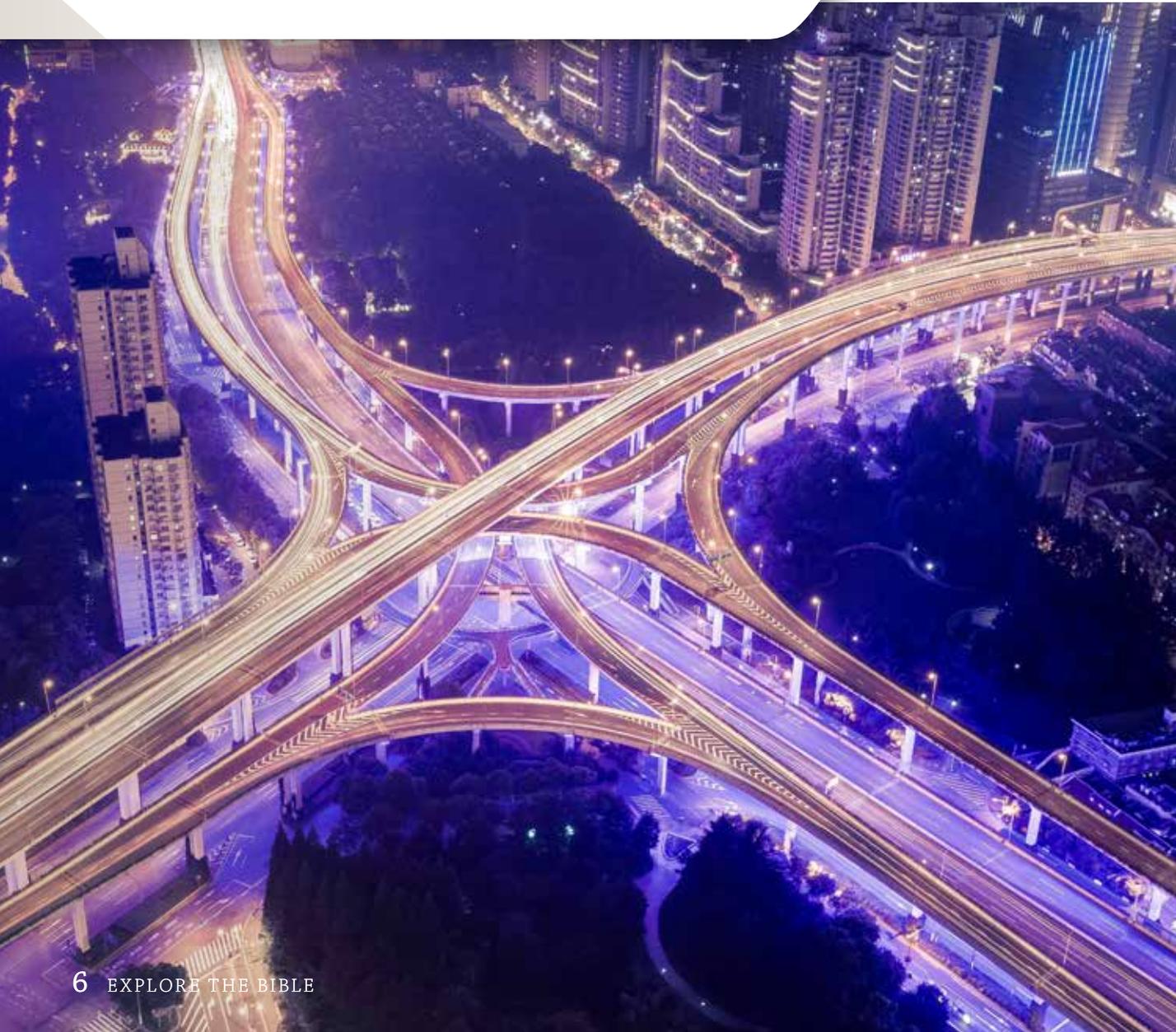
For helps on how to use *Explore the Bible*, tips on how to better lead groups, or additional ideas for leading, visit ministrygrid.com/web/explorethebible.

Session 1

United in Christ

All believers share the same salvation and thus should be unified through that confession.

1 Corinthians 1:10-25



**Have you been part of a club or an organization that was driven by its purpose?
How did that purpose help members deal with differences in the group?**

A clear purpose keeps some organizations and clubs viable. The organization's purpose unifies people with different backgrounds and opinions. But purpose alone won't keep an organization together; the purpose must be worthy and compelling. A purpose that's bigger than the individual or the needs of the group will more likely unify and sustain a group than a purpose that's reactionary or self-focused.

► UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

A church is a group of people from many different walks of life, backgrounds, and interests who find their unity in the gospel of Jesus Christ. At times divisions occur in the church over many different things—some significant and some trite. Sometimes we let our preferences get in the way of our mission, and believers are unnecessarily divided. In this week's lesson, Paul addressed divisions in the Corinthian church and called the congregation to be united.

Although the church in Corinth had significant problems, Paul was thankful that the grace of God had been given to these believers in Christ Jesus (see 1 Cor. 1:4) and that God had called them into fellowship with His Son (see v. 9). They had been sanctified in Christ and called as saints (see v. 2), having been enriched in Him in every way (see v. 5). These truths were important for the Corinthian believers to remember, especially because Paul's stern correction was soon to follow. Paul didn't begin his letter by exposing his readers' laundry list of sins but rather pointed them to their true identity in Christ.

Paul also mentioned peace. With all of their divisions and problems, Paul wanted the Corinthian believers to experience the kind of peace and wholeness the gospel provides. Whatever their circumstances or difficulties, God had called them to live in peace.

Early in this letter, however, Paul raised the issue of problems in the church at Corinth. He would go on to address these problems—mostly moral and relational but some theological—in this letter. He had a fatherly love for this church, which drove him to confront the problems present among its members (see 4:14-15). In the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians, Paul focused his attention on the disunity that was tearing the church apart.

▶ 1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-25

10 Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, that there be **no divisions among you** **A**, and that you be **united** **B** with the same understanding and the same conviction. **11** For it has been reported to me about you, my brothers and sisters, by members of Chloe's people, that there is rivalry among you. **12** What I am saying is this: One of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to **Cephas** **C**," or "I belong to Christ." **13** Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in Paul's name? **14** I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, **15** so that no one can say you were baptized in my name. **16** I did, in fact, baptize the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't recall if I baptized anyone else. **17** For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ will not be emptied of its effect. **18** For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but it is the power of God to us who are **being saved** **D**. **19** For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will set aside the intelligence of the intelligent. **20** Where is the one who is wise? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the debater of this age? Hasn't God made the world's wisdom foolish? **21** For since, in God's wisdom, the world did not know God through wisdom, God was pleased to save those who **believe** **E** through the foolishness of what is preached. **22** For the Jews ask for signs and the Greeks seek wisdom, **23** but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles. **24** Yet to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God, **25** because God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

Passage Outline

Call for Unity
(1 Cor. 1:10)

Contempt for Divisions
(1 Cor. 1:11-16)

The Cross That Divides
(1 Cor. 1:17-25)

Keywords

- A** A divided church is a weak church. The enemy loves to divide and destroy God's people (see John 10:10).
- B** Unity among God's people requires courage, conviction, clarity, and speaking God's "truth in love" (Eph. 4:15).
- C** Aramaic for "Peter" (John 1:42), a member of Jesus' inner circle whose ministry was one of grace, forgiveness, and restoration.
- D** Salvation through Christ means justification (having been saved), sanctification (being saved), and glorification (continuing to be saved).
- E** Many people know facts about Jesus, but the Lord's divine mission is to help people become His followers.

► EXPLORE THE TEXT

After his introductory comments Paul introduced the serious issue of divisions in the church. He called the church to unity in three specific ways.

1. They should agree in what they said.
2. There should be no divisions among them.
3. They should have the same understanding and the same conviction.

If the Corinthian believers were divided among themselves, the mission and the fruitfulness of the church were in perilous danger.

What factors could potentially threaten unity in a church? What steps could be taken to ensure that a local church remains unified?

KEY DOCTRINE: The church >> A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel.

The nature of the rivalry in the Corinthian church is both sad and understandable. It's sad because it was happening, but it's understandable because of the personalities at the heart of it. Some claimed to belong to Paul, some to Apollos, some to Cephas, and some to Christ. These men were important leaders who were connected to the church in Corinth in some way. They each played an influential part in the growth of the believers in Corinth. Ironically, some also claimed to belong to Christ. The truth is, all of the Corinthian believers belonged to Him.

Where do you see this kind of division in the church today? How does rivalry get in the way of God's work?

For Paul, the cross of Christ was a rallying point and unifier for the church. There should be no disagreement, disunity, or division about that among God's people. Nevertheless, the cross divides. It divides those who are perishing from those who are being saved. It divides those who depend on the world's wisdom from "those who believe through the foolishness of what is preached" about Christ (1 Cor. 1:21). The same message of the cross that unifies believers is also a divisive message for those who seek human wisdom and wonders as the highest end.

In what ways is the cross of Christ divisive in our world today? In what ways is it a stumbling block and foolishness for people today?

BIBLE SKILL: Memorize a verse and apply it to a real-life situation. >> Memorize 1 Corinthians 1:23 in your preferred Bible translation. Then write the verse in your own words. Finally, write a couple of sentences stating how the verse can help you remember that every person you meet needs the gospel.

➤ APPLY THE TEXT

- › Believers are to be unified by their confession of Christ.
- › Basing allegiances on human personalities leads to prideful boasting and divisions in the church.
- › The only dividing line believers should recognize is the division between those who are saved and those who aren't.

Consider the relationships you have with other believers, noting those with different backgrounds. How have those relationships strengthened your spiritual life? Thank God for friendships based on a shared Savior.

As a group, determine practical ways you can hold one another accountable for preserving unity and can help one another resist the temptation to form divisive factions around popular leaders or personalities.

What walls have you built between yourself and other people? Which of those walls get in the way of your building relationships with other believers? What actions do you need to take to begin removing those walls?



► DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Divisions occur in bodies of believers.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10, underlining the commands in this verse.

Paul made a point to let the Corinthians know this was a family discussion. After all, he was writing to brothers and sisters in the Lord. Paul urged them in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Appealing to Jesus was an important move by Paul. There's no higher authority than our Lord, who Himself prayed that His followers would live in unity with one another (see John 17:20-23).

First Corinthians mentions several areas of potential division in a church. The list includes leaders (see 1:12–4:21), tolerating immorality in the church (see chap. 5), going to secular court against fellow believers (see 6:1-11), marriage (see chap. 7), meat offered to idols (see chaps. 8–10), conduct of women in the church (see 11:1-16), the Lord's Supper (see 11:17-34), spiritual gifts (see chaps. 12–14), and Jesus' resurrection (see chap. 15).

What factors could potentially threaten unity in your church?

Day 2: Believers should be united through Christ.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10, identifying the three ways Paul called the church to unity.

Paul called the church to unity in three specific ways. First, they should agree with one another. Unity comes through a common confession of the gospel. That confession is Jesus Christ and Him crucified (see 2:2). As Paul did in Romans and Ephesians, he laid a doctrinal foundation on which an ethical life could be built. Paul was calling the believers to doctrinal and theological unity.

Second, there should be no divisions among the Corinthian Christians. Paul was calling them to relational unity based on their identity in Jesus Christ. This is the core of Paul's message in chapters 1–4. The Corinthian believers were to be united together in Christ, not divided into factions that separated them from one another.

Third, the church should be perfectly united in mind and thought. Paul was calling them to missional unity, reminding them that there's no room for disagreement about the nature of the gospel or the mission to be ambassadors of God's reconciling work in Christ (see 2 Cor. 5:16-21). If the Corinthian believers were divided among themselves, the mission and the fruitfulness of the church were in perilous danger.

What steps can you take to ensure that your local church remains unified?

Day 3: All believers belong to Christ.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:11-12, noting to whom the people claimed to belong.

Someone informed Paul about quarrels that threatened the church. This report was no idle gossip but rather a sincere recognition of the danger of division running rampant among members. Some claimed to belong to Paul, some to Apollos, some to Cephas, and some to Christ.

Paul had founded the church in Corinth (see Acts 18:8). Apollos had played an instrumental role in the growth of the church (see Acts 18:24-27). Cephas was important to some members of the Corinthian church. Cephas, also known as Peter, was one of the Twelve and was close to Jesus. Peter, James, and John were “recognized as pillars” in the church in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:9). Peter was known to be an apostle to the Jews (see Gal. 2:7-8), which is likely the reason some in the Corinthian church followed him and claimed to belong to his camp.

Ironically, some also claimed to belong to Christ. The truth is, all of the Corinthian believers belonged to Him. It could be that those who made this claim did so out of genuine theological accuracy, rising above the fray of lesser allegiances and divisions. Or it could be that they wanted to appear superspiritual to those who aligned with Paul, Apollos, or Peter: “Hey, you belong to Apollos? Oh, yeah? Well, I belong to Christ. So take that!”

How does rivalry with other Christians get in the way of your doing God’s work?

Day 4: Believers must put Jesus before all other leaders.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:13-15, considering the questions Paul asked.

Paul’s contempt for the church’s rivalry and division is clear in these verses. Paul was thankful he baptized only a handful of people in Corinth. Even though he laid a foundation as a skilled builder of the Corinthian church (see 3:10), he wasn’t interested in building his own little kingdom. He was an apostle of Jesus, interested in preaching Christ only and Christ sufficient so that Christ’s kingdom could flourish.

Some people today take pride in the fact that they were baptized by a well-known pastor, were converted under the ministry of a famous evangelist, or follow the teaching of a respected theologian or leader. More disturbing is the reality that some leaders boast in numbers of people they’ve baptized or ministries they’ve grown. Paul’s verdict? He said the Corinthians should think of him and Apollos as servants of Christ and as managers of the mysteries of God (see 4:1). Nothing more, nothing less. We ought to think of leaders we respect in this way as well.

Are there any leaders you elevate above Christ in your life? How can you continue to respect those leaders while placing Christ first in your life?

Day 5: All believers share the same salvation.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-23, paying close attention to verse 21.

In the Corinthian culture and context, Paul was contending with two objections to the message of the gospel.

1. Jews asked for signs. For the Jews, the cross was a bad sign, identified with a curse and not a blessing (see Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13). For this reason the cross is “a stumbling block to the Jews” (v. 23); it’s a divisive claim on God’s behalf.
2. Greeks sought wisdom. Much of Paul’s argument in these verses compared the wisdom of the world with the wisdom of God. For the Greeks, wisdom meant the teachings of their pagan philosophers. Because the gospel did not meet the logical standards of their own thinkers, they rejected it as foolishness.

“We preach Christ crucified,” Paul said in verse 23. This claim, at its heart, is divisive to the world; but to those whom God has called, it’s God’s wisdom and power. The cross divides because the world seeks its own way, but the only way to God is through His crucified Son.

In what ways has the cross caused division between you and others? In what ways has the cross been a stumbling block for your friends and relatives?



*God’s family, which comes into being by regeneration,
is more central and more lasting than the human family
that comes into being by procreation.*

JOHN PIPER

➤ OBEY THE TEXT

Reflect on the truths found in 1 Corinthians 1 and record your responses to the following questions or discuss them with two other members of your Bible-study group.

What has God revealed to you this week about your unity with other believers?

How does any disunity in your relationships with other believers affect your ability to do God's work in your small group and in your church as a whole?

How can you foster unity in your church without compromising the reality of the cross?

MEMORIZE

We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:23

MY THOUGHTS

Record insights and questions from this session's group experience and daily exploration.

MY RESPONSE

Note specific ways you'll put into practice the truth explored this week.

MY PRAYERS

List specific prayer needs and answers to remember this week.

