

The most influential people
are the wildly idealistic. The most
beloved by creation, those who
give back—love and
life and dreams—
more than they take.
Pray, O God, that we may live it.
Pray, O God, that I actually do.

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Dan Nighswander, *New Believers Church Commentary: 1 Corinthians*, Herald, Harrisonburg, VA, 2017. 402 pp. \$29.99. ISBN: 978-1-5138-0244-2.

In his commentary on 1 Corinthians, Dan Nighswander sets out to unite his love of academic scholarship and pastoral ministry. Describing the biblical letter as “one of the richest sources of practical advice [in the scriptures],” Nighswander not only seeks to provide the reader with relevant cultural context, language study, and awareness of form, but also practical advice for the use of 1 Corinthians in our ministerial context today (19).

Nighswander’s intent comes through clearly in how he divides the sections of commentary for each part of the letter he examines. Along with the explanatory notes and basic outlines to be expected in any commentary, he includes two larger sections: the “Text in Biblical Context” and the “Text in the Life of the Church.”

As I read through the commentary, I was particularly pulled toward “the Text in the Life of the Church” sections. In these sections, Nighswander identifies themes that can be developed for preaching and teaching (113–14), book recommendations (125, 157), reflections on pastoral care (123–24), and suggestions on using a chapter from 1 Corinthians as a case study for church discernment (189). These ideas are a jumping-off point for the reader to continue looking at 1 Corinthians through a creative lens. I enjoyed Nighswander’s ideas for how 1 Corinthians can be engaged by congregations, as well as his liturgical awareness to point out which parts of 1 Corinthians are a part of the regular lectionary rotation and which are never read when strictly following the lectionary.

Nighswander’s attention to the practical applications and studies available to churches from 1 Corinthians, as well as his attention to lectionary inclusion of parts of the text, have caused me to reflect on how churches curate which scriptures are used in worship and study and which are not. I have only been at Lima

Mennonite Church for over a year and a half. During that time, I have used the lectionary for special liturgical seasons such as Lent and Advent, but I have not stuck strictly to the lectionary in other seasons of the year. I wonder what it would be like in those times to pay special attention to texts neglected by the lectionary. This would provide conversation and education for our congregation that may not otherwise occur.

I also wonder—given Nighswander’s many themes offered throughout the book—what it would look like to offer Bible studies or discussions around a particular theme rather than looking at 1 Corinthians in its entirety. Teaching a Bible study on “Factionalism in the Corinthian Church,” for instance—using Nighswander’s insights from the commentary—could pique interest because of the specificity and relevance of the topic to our struggles with factionalism in the church today.

Another Bible study option could work at including the most recent scholarship in conversation by looking at a specific theological question that has shaped the church. I felt particularly refreshed by Nighswander’s clarification regarding the word “flesh” and how Paul uses it in his writings. “*Flesh*, as Paul uses the word, refers to the whole person outside of Christ” (136, emphasis original). His dismissal of body-spirit dualism as an inherent feature of his theology could provide important fodder for discussion. Paul’s theology not only releases us from body hatred but also requires us to take a more holistic look at who we are in Christ. Opportunities for practical application and reflection abound when we are able to explore good questions with helpful resources in tow.

Overall, I resonated with Nighswander’s descriptions of the struggles within the Corinthian Church and his practical approach to engaging them in our congregations. Given our tendencies toward factionalism, questions about what it means to live out the Christian life, and even more struggle when it comes to living as a community, it is no surprise that Nighswander finds such a wealth of practical advice in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. Even with millennia between us, the church of today has much in common with the Corinthians and can utilize this ancient text for learning and growth. Nighswander has done good work in his commentary to create a tool that enables us to engage with scripture in community so that we can live out Christ’s calling in our world together.

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