

What's at Stake with My Steak? — Pastor Ray Harms-Wiebe — 1 Corinthians 8:1-6

### *A WORD FROM PASTOR JONATHAN*

1. Our annual **Leadership Day** is on **Saturday, September 20**. Pastor Ray and the Leadership Team will present our church's vision for discipleship, including what it means to be a disciple and how we do discipleship. If we want our church to thrive, we must be on the same page. It won't be a one-way street. We'll have breakout sessions to meet and discuss with fellow co-laborers from across Willingdon. Table facilitators will collect feedback to help church leadership hone their plans.

After the morning session, lunch will be provided to **Life Group Leader Breakout** attendees. I'll present new initiatives, like Intro to Community and a new curriculum. We'll have group discussions about what discipleship looks like in our Life Group ministry. Please sign up if you're a leader or thinking about becoming one!

**Registration is free, but you'll need to sign up by September 15** so they can prep food and space. On the day, you'll pick up your lunch voucher at the check-in desk between 8:30 and 9:00.

Registration Link: <https://willingdon.churchcenter.com/registrations/events/3132090>.

2. We're hosting a **Sanctuary Course**. Learn about how our church (and Life Groups) can love those with mental health challenges by offering companionship, supporting recovery, and promoting wellbeing. There are eight sessions with videos and discussions on big mental health topics. Our staff went through it in the spring and found it helpful. You'll meet on **Tuesdays, from 7:00 to 8:30, from September 16 to November 18** (except September 30 and November 11). There's a \$40 book fee. **Register ASAP while there's still space.**

Registration Link: <https://willingdon.churchcenter.com/registrations/events/3083414>.

### *DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND NOTES*

#### *Break the Ice*

1. **What subject/topic do you know more about than others in your group? Can you share a fact that your group (hopefully) will find interesting?**

Are you from somewhere that most people aren't familiar with? Do you have a unique hobby? Does your job give you access to something customers don't know?

I'm one of the rare Floridians at Willingdon. (Pastor Jerry and Randi also lived in Florida, so they know this stuff!) I've shared with many Vancouverites about how alligators are a thing there, like bears here. Here's a gator they caught not too far from my parents' home: <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/UxZH7m2Seqc>. And I can't forget Publix subs (<https://youtube.com/shorts/PJC0o6cQ4QU>). Or the pirate boat that cruises out by Clearwater Beach (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WVgrQJ52Wxo>). My parents never took us out on Captain Memo's!

In this week's passage, knowledge was used to inflate egos and build pride.

**2. Was there a fact you thought you knew, but realized was wrong?**

There's something called the Mandela Effect, coined by Fiona Broome. A ton of people thought Nelson Mandela died in the 80s, but he actually died in 2013. There are many other examples. I could have sworn that it was Berenstein (BerenSTEEN) Bears, but it's actually Barenstain Bears. I also could have sworn there was a Sinbad genie movie called Shazaam in the '90s. There was a Shaq genie movie called Kazaam, but no Sinbad one. People often quote Darth Vader as saying, "Luke, I am your father." He actually says, "No, I am your father." ([https://youtu.be/IOT2p\\_FcVA](https://youtu.be/IOT2p_FcVA)).

In this week's passage, certain Corinthians thought they knew everything about meat sacrificed to idols, but they got a few things wrong.

**3. Have you ever had a teacher (e.g., school, music, church) who helped you love a subject? Why?**

Some of us had great teachers who opened up an exciting world to us, like literature or science. Others had teachers spark a passion in our hearts for music or art.

I took three semesters of physics with calculus in university (big mistake on my part!). My physics professors all hated teaching. They had to teach so the university would let them do research. What they did enjoy was giving impossibly hard exams that only four ultra-nerds did well on. They seemed to relish making themselves seem smart, not making us smart.

On the flipside, there's a Texas A&M physics professor who's gone viral ([https://youtube.com/shorts/otq\\_QBDPu2M](https://youtube.com/shorts/otq_QBDPu2M)). She clearly loves the subject and gets a blast out of blowing her students' minds with how fascinating and applicable physics can be. I wish I had her!

In this passage, some Corinthians should have used their knowledge to lovingly build up other Christians instead of building up their ego.

**Warm Up****4. Why was food offered to idols an issue?**

Corinthian Christians lived in a city filled with temples. Jewish leaders taught that Jews couldn't eat meat that was offered to an idol: "Meat that enters the house of idol worship is permitted, and meat that exits this house is prohibited, because it is considered as offerings to the dead, i.e., to idols; this is the statement of Rabbi Akiva" (Mishna Avodah Zara 2.3)

Here's some background for Christians in that era.

*The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* – Meat was offered to idols before being served in temples' dining halls (often as part of worship) or being used for communal meals; some of the meat served at the marketplace had been offered to idols. One who ate in a temple would know the source of the meat; one who ate at a pagan friend's home could never be certain...

The matter was more troubling for Christians converted from pagan backgrounds: could they meet over lunch with business associates or fellow members of their trade guild, or attend a reception in a temple for a relative's wedding? ...

The more educated and socially elite group, who, unlike the poor, ate meat regularly and not just when it was doled out at pagan festivals, had well-to-do friends who would serve meat...

Eating meat sacrificed to idols was a normal thing. Can Christians partake? For some Christians, idols are nothing but make-believe, so it's fine. It's like offering my son's food to one of his stuffed animals before offering it to him. It's all pretend.

For others, it was partaking in or endorsing those gods. Some used to do it earnestly, so seeing other Christians do it felt wrong. We'll dig deeper into examples for next week's sermon questions.

## 5. How can knowledge "puff up"?

The word Paul uses is *φυσίω* (foo-see-o-o), meaning "to cause to have an exaggerated self-conception, puff up, make proud" (BDAG). It can also be translated as "arrogant" (NASB), "makes us feel important" (NLT), or the fun-to-say KJV "puffeth". This word pops up 7 times in the Bible: six times in this letter and once in 2 Corinthians.

When I hear "puffed up," I picture a guy who's cock of the walk, a rooster with his chest puffed out, strutting like he owns the place (<https://youtube.com/shorts/8fZwnkvZ4P4>).

**Pride.** It can feel good to know more than others. Knowledge often results from hard work. People with PhDs put in years of study. People well-versed in the Bible or theology have also done the work. There's a self-righteousness that comes from knowing you did more than others. "I worked hard to know what I know, so I'm better than others who don't. I'm closer to God because I know more about God."

You can also feel like you're better than others because your brain "gets it" while others don't. You see where others are ignorant or fail. People are struggling to make the pieces fit, but your brain instantly makes things click.

**Gatekeeping.** People "in the know" may want to keep others in the dark. Their knowledge gives them a perceived higher status. As a wise man once said, "... when everyone's super, no one will be." (<https://youtube.com/shorts/TMSrIWb6uP4>).

I knew a pastor with many cryptic Facebook posts. People would respond with, "Could you explain what you mean?" or "Please tell me more." His primary responses were "For me to know and you to find out!" or "You don't know because you are naïve!" I was always so confused. Someone was earnestly trying to learn from this pastor. Instead of joyfully taking advantage of a teaching opportunity, he teased or insulted. For a long time, he'd put up lots of posts telling people not to be SING, an acronym he made up for Simplistic, Ignorant, Naïve, Gullible, while accusing lots of people of being SING. "So and so votes for that politician because they're SING!"

"I am not SING! I follow the 66 books of the Bible!" He never explained how to not be SING or did anything to help anyone. He seemed to really enjoy thinking he was the smartest one online.

### Dig Deeper

**6. Pastor Ray said, "... an idol is anything that becomes more central and essential to your life than God. An idol captures your affections, thoughts, and energies, making it more important to you than God." What idols do you struggle with?**

Ask yourself, "Where do I look for meaning, security, significance, and a sense of value? Is my heart wholly devoted to God, or have I given my heart to an idol?"

Pastor Ray gave some examples of idols in his sermon. I've expanded on his descriptions.

**Money** can be exchanged for goods and services (<https://youtu.be/A81DYZh6KaQ>). It can buy you life's necessities like food, clothing, and shelter. It can also buy you unnecessary (but fun and nice!) luxuries. It can be an idol when you're more concerned about pleasure or luxuries than producing fruit (Matthew 13:18-23). People may sacrifice their time with God or serving others to work more than necessary. Or hold tightly on to their money without considering how to use it to bless others through offerings, supporting missions, or treating newcomers to meals. Some idolize money when their lives revolve around getting money instead of obeying God, or attribute their wealth to their own work while ignoring God's enabling.

**Power** feels good and lets you control, status among your peers, and social approval. You're able to bend others to your will and receive praise from others. It can go wrong when we use our power for ourselves (Mark 10:41-45) or think we should control our destinies.

**Success** can go wrong when we're driven by the need for ministry success or career achievement. Our success determines our identity, instead of our relationship with God (Philippians 3:3-11). We look up to those who are successful and look down on those who aren't. We judge success by worldly standards instead of God's, like valuing earthly treasure accumulated over heavenly impact (Matthew 6:19-24). We're willing to cut corners or sin against others to succeed.

**Relationships** are important because that's how God built us. Companionship, friendship, and sex are all good things created by God. But we compromise our faith when we pursue relationships with people who aren't pursuing God (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). It shows our priority is not God, and we compromise our faith. If someone declares that they care deeply about the environment, but romances guys who throw their garbage out of their car windows, I would question their environmentalism. You'd think they would be drawn to guys who reduce, reuse, and recycle. If following Jesus is your thing, then following Jesus should be a key attractive quality.

**Doctrine** and focusing on being right can become a false god if people rely on it for their standing with God rather than God himself and His grace. Our knowledge doesn't save us. Even demons have good doctrine (James 2:19), but they rejected God's love. Ironically, many biblical scholars with PhDs have written lots of books about the Bible but aren't Christian.

**Family** is a gift from God, but sometimes we focus more on the gift than the giver. The health of our family relationships determines our self-worth and identity. Many of us grew up in an honor/shame culture. The priority was making our family look good. We behaved well so we wouldn't bring shame to our parents. Parents raised their kids well so they would be looked up to by other parents. I've heard parents gossip about parents with kids who weren't academically successful or left the church. I've shared before about a friend with half-Taiwanese, half-black kids who received a lot of racist attention at a Chinese church.

The goal of the family wasn't to honor God but to make themselves look good by human values. We may do what our parents want us to do, even if it means disobeying God (e.g., burning incense for ancestors because that honors the family). We may prioritize our kids' success over God by sacrificing the church for their extracurriculars.

**Sports Teams** are big. It's great to be a fan of a team, but when the team becomes our identity, it's a problem. There are tons of videos of fans (always men for some reason) going into a blind rage and destroying the TV when their team loses. I've shared before about a seminary classmate who would post on Facebook, "GO TO HELL, CAROLINA!" whenever they played Duke. Evidently, telling other teams to go to hell is something people say ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I%27m\\_a\\_Tar\\_Heel\\_Born](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I%27m_a_Tar_Heel_Born)). Others get excited or depressed based on their team's wins and losses. Almost half of Christians in a survey said they'd skip Sunday worship to watch a game (<https://research.lifeway.com/2023/07/12/weather-most-likely-reason-for-churchgoers-skipping-services/>).

7. **Pastor Ray said, "Sometimes we think we know more than we actually know (about politics, science, psychology, world events, sports, theology). People who know a lot are usually humble because they are aware of how much they do not know. Our knowledge is always incomplete and flawed." Why is it dangerous to think we know more than we really know?**

**Looking Down.** It's very easy for knowledgeable Christians to look down on those who don't know as much. I hear Christians use terms like "woke", "liberal", or "progressive" to disparage others whose faith doesn't seem to align with the Bible. Their tone often has a tinge of contempt. These blanket terms ignore any nuance or common ground. It's also easy to look down on people who don't take Christianity as seriously as we do. We're the true, dedicated followers of Jesus, while they're slackers and fake Christians.

We forget that we are "better" only by God's grace. We don't deserve to be knowledgeable or to see the light. If it weren't for the Holy Spirit, we'd be just like them or worse. And we also forget that God wants us to lovingly encourage them to grow in their faith, because we're too busy judging.

**Don't Need to Learn.** "I already know everything! I've read all the books and attended all the classes! I'm super smart." Knowledge becomes an end-all/be-all. It's the goal and mission. We forget that it's also about *being* Christian and putting knowledge into action. And, most importantly, we forget that the goal is Jesus.

**Expert/Go-To.** We may think we're the authority. People should come to us for advice, wisdom, and knowledge. We overestimate how important we are. I've met people who are guilty of thinking that everyone needs to learn from them. I've been guilty of this, too.

**Blind Spots.** We might not realize there are gaps or errors in our thinking. “Others may be off, but I got it all down!” Think of Solomon. He was the wisest person in history, but he somehow didn’t see that marrying 1,000 women was a bad idea. Not only that, many of his wives worshipped foreign Gods. You’d think he’d try to convert them. “Honey, you should check out the God of Israel! He’s the best! He’s protected my people for hundreds of years and did a ton of miracles! Come to the temple for Him I built.” Nope. He actually built places for his wives to worship those gods, like Ashtoreth, Milcom, Chemosh, and Molech. You know, Molech, the god that likes child sacrifices (Leviticus 18:21). Not only that, he worshipped those gods (1 Kings 11:1-8)!

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). His heart overrode his knowledge.

**Confusion.** While looking for books on Amazon, an author’s books caught my eye. Here’s part of his bio: “An accomplished author, speaker, and expert on spiritual warfare and deliverance, he has published well over 100 books on every area of successful Christian living. He is an acclaimed family and relationship counselor with several titles dealing with those critical areas in the lives of the children of God.” He presents himself as an expert people should go to. His books are all nonsense and based on concepts you can’t find in the Bible, like having dominion over “water spirits” (<https://www.gotquestions.org/marine-spirits.html>), defeating “the python spirit” (<https://www.gotquestions.org/python-spirit.html>), how to “break anti-favor curses, witchcraft resistance, and family rejection altars” (<https://africa.thegospelcoalition.org/article/your-problem-isnt-an-evil-altar-but-god-is-the-solution/>), and deliverance from “spirit husband and spirit wife, incubus and succubus demons and all sex demons of the night” (<https://www.gotquestions.org/spiritual-spouse.html>).

He thinks he’s so knowledgeable, but he doesn’t realize that so much of his theology is nonsense. Now he’s written books to confuse others, too. Many of his books have hundreds of positive reviews.

We may not be as off as he is, but we can be confused, too.

## 8. Why is it important to be known by God?

There are a lot of potential answers. Here’s mine.

Cristiano Ronaldo has the most Instagram followers, with almost 700 million ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_most-followed\\_Instagram\\_accounts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_most-followed_Instagram_accounts)). He is one of the most beloved people on the planet. But how many fans does Ronaldo know? Probably a few hundred, maybe. He doesn’t know the faces, names, or stories of probably 99.99% of his fans. His human brain can’t keep up with 700 million people. All those people love Ronaldo, but he doesn’t know them. They can watch his games, buy his jerseys, and argue with other footie fans that Ronaldo’s the greatest, but he will never, ever hang out with them, talk to them, or even know them. Most fans won’t even have a chance to make a sculpture for him (<https://youtu.be/W7km3cu0Hul>). It’s a one-way street.

It’s the same thing with Taylor Swift, who had a record-breaking tour with 149 shows across 21 countries (<https://routenote.com/blog/taylor-swift-eras-tour-stat>). Over 10 million fans bought tickets. One concert had almost 100,000 Swifties! One of my wife’s former co-workers traveled across Canada with her niece to attend Taylor

Swift concerts and wait in line for hours to buy merch. These fans are dedicated! But Taylor Swift will never know about the first time they fell in love with her songs, invite them to her wedding with Travis (<https://people.com/taylor-swift-travis-kelce-wedding-wont-be-a-spectacle-exclusive-11805920>), or share a meal.

But the God of the universe, who created all eight billion people in the world, knows me. The God who created the universe (Genesis 1) formed me in my mother's womb over 40 years ago and knows my next 40 years (Psalm 139:13-16). He knows stuff about me that I don't even know, like how many hairs are on my head (Matthew 10:29-31). He even knows what I need when I don't (Romans 8:26-27). He knew me and loved me even before I was born. He died for me while I was His rebellious enemy (Romans 5:6-11). He invited me to His wedding and banquet (Revelation 19:9). He adopted me to be His son (Ephesians 1:5). The list goes on and on.

Almost no fans will work out with Ronaldo in his personal gym (<https://youtube.com/shorts/sX88J3jKPU>). Only a tiny percentage of Taylor's fans will ever be invited to one of her many multi-million-dollar mansions (<https://www.elledecor.com/celebrity-style/celebrity-homes/g21792583/taylor-swift-house-home0>) that their fans paid for. But God has prepared a room for me to stay in forever (John 14:2-3).

Everyone knows about famous and powerful people. But this one knows us back. And He lavishes us with His bounty.

## 9. What line of the Nicene Creed stands out to you, either because it's comforting or confusing?

I've included the version/translation that Pastor Ray used here:

I believe in one God,  
the Father Almighty,  
Maker of heaven and earth,  
of all things visible and invisible.  
And in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Son of God, begotten of the Father, before all ages,  
the only-begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father,  
God of God, Light of Light,  
very God of very God,  
begotten, not made,  
being of one substance with the Father;  
by whom all things were made;  
who, for us men and for our salvation,  
came down from heaven,  
and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary,  
and was made man;  
and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered and was buried,  
and the third day he rose again,  
according to the Scriptures;  
and ascended into heaven

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life;  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son;  
who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped  
and glorified;  
who has spoken by the prophets.  
And in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.  
I confess one baptism for the remission of sins;  
and I look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

and is seated at the right hand of the Father;  
and he will come again, with glory,  
to judge both the living and the dead;  
whose kingdom will have no end.

A quick note that people always ask: catholic is lower case c, meaning universal. It doesn't mean the Roman Catholic Church. There's just too much to write about, so here's an article with a brief rundown:

<https://www.logos.com/grow/nook-nicene-creed>.