

# **Life Group Commentary 1 Cor 16:1–24 “Christian Stewardship: Tithe, Time, Talent” For the Sermon Preached on Mar 26 and For Life Groups through Apr 2**

## **Icebreaker Questions**

Tell the group about a time that you either were able to give a generous gift (of money, time, etc.) or a time that you received such a gift.

## **Read the Biblical Text: 1 Cor 16:1–24 (16:1–12)**

*Note: Pastor Richard plans to preach a second sermon from 1 Corinthians 16 that focuses on vs. 13-14. To make sure that we adequately cover the chapter in our life groups, this week we will focus our attention on 1 Corinthians 16:1-12 and next week we will focus on 16:13-24.*

## **Pastor Richard’s Sermon Outline**

- I. Stewardship of Our Tithe (vv. 1-4)
  - a. Giving is an act of worship (v. 1).
  - b. Giving is to be practiced by every believer (v. 2a).
  - c. Giving is to be done cheerfully and without coercion (vv. 1-4).
- II. Stewardship of Our Time (vv. 5-9)
  - a. Commit to serve God as you have opportunity (vv. 5-8).
  - b. Commit to continue in the opportunity God provides (v. 9).
- III. Stewardship of Our Talent (vv. 10-24)
  - a. To effectively use our talent requires teamwork (vv. 10-14).
  - b. To effectively use our talent requires commitment (vv. 15-24).

## **Observations of the Biblical Text**

1. According to Paul in v. 1, what is the first part of 1 Corinthians 16 about?  
[1 Corinthians 16:1-4 is about the “collection for the saints.”]
2. What does Paul want the Corinthians to do according to v. 2  
[He wants them to set aside money each week, on the first day of the week, so they will have something to give in the collection.]
3. According to v. 2, how does Paul say they should determine how much to give?  
[Paul says the gift should be “as he (the giver) may prosper.”]
4. What does Paul want to avoid in v. 2?  
[He wants to avoid collecting the money when he arrives.]
5. What additional precautions is Paul taking concerning the money according to vs. 3-4?  
[He wants the Corinthians to appoint some people to travel with the money to keep everyone accountable.]
6. According to vs. 5-8, what are Paul’s travel plans?  
[Paul plans to visit the Corinthians after he leaves Ephesus (after Pentecost) and passes through Macedonia. He may stay in Corinth through the whole winter. He doesn’t want to visit now when he doesn’t have enough time to stay for long.]
7. How does Paul describe his stay in Ephesus in v. 9?  
[He has a “wide door of effective work” in Ephesus, but there are many “adversaries.”]

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8. How does Paul describe Timothy in vs. 10-11?

[Timothy is doing the Lord’s work as a missionary, and he is traveling and serving with Paul.]

### **Interpretation of the Biblical Text**

1. In v. 1 Paul mentions a “collection for the saints.” What might Paul be talking about here? Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, 9:1-2 and Romans 15:25-29. How do these texts help us to answer this question? What can our church learn from the Scripture here?

[This is a fairly simple question about which scholars love to argue. Here is the short version: From almost the beginning of his ministry, Paul was engaged in raising money from Christians in the cities he visited as a missionary to help the impoverished Jewish Christians living in Jerusalem who were facing terrible poverty and persecution from the Romans and the Jews. Their plight of poverty may be related to a famine in that area (c.f. Acts 11:27-28—this famine most likely happened as the result of a drought during the reign of Emperor Claudius). This may be the same collection as mentioned in Galatians 2:10, but is, more likely, a second attempt by Paul to raise money to support the Judean Christians in their time of great need. It is also likely that this collection for the saints is never mentioned in Acts, though there may be a brief mention of it in Acts 24:17. Paul specifically references this gentile collection of money for relief in Judea in 1 Corinthians 16, 2 Corinthians 8-9, and Romans 15. Here is what Paul says about the collection itself in each of these texts (to discuss Paul’s theology and practice of giving from 1 Corinthians 16, see #2 below.

- **1 Corinthians 16** – By the time Paul has reached Corinth, the collection was well underway. He had been instructing churches, as early as the first missionary journey, to take part as they were able. The collecting of money was done as a part of the Christian worship service, and the church was responsible for selecting people to oversee the money while it was being taken to the Judean Christians.
- **2 Corinthians 8-9** – Paul gives a number of practical and spiritual principles about giving in 2 Corinthians 8-9. Paul reminds the Corinthians that Christians in Philippi, who were far less wealthy than the Corinthians, were being far more generous (2 Cor 8:1-5). Paul instructs the church that giving takes discipline and regular (weekly) commitment (2 Corinthians 8:10-15). Paul also insists that giving and generosity are “contagious,” and that is a good thing (2 Corinthians 9:1-5). Paul never wants anyone to give money they don’t have, nor does he want anyone to be forced to give. Rather, he wants the gospel to change their hearts and make them into generous people (2 Corinthians 9:6-14).
- **Romans 15** – Paul is in the process of planning to return to Jerusalem to bring aid to the saints (Romans 15:25). All the Christian churches in Greece have participated in the raising of this money. Christians have an obligation to take care of one another even if they are different races and live in different nations (Romans 15:27-29).

It should not be difficult for us to find principles for our own church and for our own lives in these passages:

- We also should sacrificially give money, as a part of our Christian worship, to take care of Christians in need and support our missionaries.

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- Our church has a great responsibility to select trustworthy and spiritual people to oversee the money our church collects.
- We should be as generous as we can be.
- We should practice a disciplined and regular weekly commitment to giving to God’s work at Crossroads.
- We should never attempt to pressure people to give money they don’t have. Rather, we should proclaim the gospel so frequently that people’s hearts are changed, making them into ever more generous people.
- We should never shy away from reminding all believers that as Christians we have an obligation to take care of one another, even if the people in need are different races and live in different nations.]

2. Review what Paul says in vs. 1-4 about his plans to take up this collection? What principles can we discover about giving from these verses?

[You may want to cover Interpretation questions #1 and #2 together. They are similar. #1 focuses on Paul’s broader teaching on the collection. #2 focuses specifically on what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 16:1-4.

Throughout his letters, Paul gives us a number of Christian principles regarding generosity. In this passage he shows us five basic principles:

- **v. 1 – Generosity is not optional for the believer in Jesus.** Paul does not expect every Christian and every church to give to every cause, but he does expect every Christian and every church to practice generosity and to take responsibility for the needs that are right in front of them. God expects the same from us and from our church.
- **v. 2 – Giving is to be done regularly and as a part of our weekly worship.** The Corinthians didn’t have bank-to-bank transfers and online giving. They had to physically bring their money to the gathering for collection. Paul instructs them to do this on the first day of the week, when the church was gathered for worship and for Bible study. Paul wants the Corinthians to connect in their minds the resurrection of Jesus and the gospel with their worship and their giving. This does not mean that online giving is bad, but it does mean that we might need to work harder to keep the resurrection of Jesus and the gospel connected in our minds with our worship, church attendance, and our giving. We must never come to neglect any of these.
- **v. 2- Giving is to be done in accordance with our prosperity.** The New Testament never prescribes an amount to be given, not even a percentage, but much of what the New Testament teaches about giving is rooted in the Old Testament system of giving and tithing. This is why most Christians assume a tithe (10%) is what God wants for his people. Regardless of the amount that any Christian family decides on to give, Paul wants us to link our prosperity with our giving. If our financial situation improves and we are able to give more (even much more), we should. In those moments when our financial situations are stressed, God does not expect us to give our only grocery money to feed other hungry people.

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- **v. 2 – Avoid showy public collections.** Paul covers this in greater detail in 2 Corinthians 8-9, but he always shies away from big public collections and pushes for giving. Paul is afraid that people will feel pressured to give money they can't afford or will use their giving as a chance to flaunt their wealth.

**vs. 3-4 – Always careful and accountable with other people's money.** In v. 3 Paul is calling for accountability with how the donated money is collected, transported, and spent. He does not want the Corinthians to simply give over the money and forget about it. The Corinthians need to appoint people to collect the money, travel with it, and help with its disbursement. This keeps the Corinthians involved in the ministry long after the money is given, and it holds everyone accountable.]

3. What principles for Christian living can we discern from the way Paul talks about his travel plans in relation to the Corinthians in vs. 5-9?

[Before we jump right into these verses, it may be helpful to review Paul's travels in general, and his visits and letters with the Corinthians. We covered all of this in Sunday Night Discipleship, so go over only as much of this as you think would be helpful in your life group.

### **Paul's Chronology and Travels:**

- Around AD 34, Paul has a vision of Christ and converts to Christianity.
- Between AD 34-47, Paul travels to Arabia, Damascus, and Jerusalem, doing missionary work and meeting with the other Apostles.
- Paul's first major missionary undertaking is from AD 47-48 to the Roman province of Galatia. He writes Galatians shortly after (Acts 13-14).
- In AD 49 Paul is instrumental in helping to settle the theological dispute in Jerusalem (Acts 15 – the Council of Jerusalem).
- Paul's second major missionary undertaking is from AD 49-51 to the Greek peninsula. On this journey he writes 1 and 2 Thessalonians (Acts 15-18).
- Paul's third major missionary undertaking is from AD 51-54 to Ephesus where he spends most of the three years. On this journey he writes 1 and 2 Corinthians and Romans (Acts 18-21).
- In AD 55, Paul is arrested in Jerusalem after returning from his third missionary journey. He remains in prison in Caesarea until around AD 58 (Acts 21-26).
- Between AD 58-60 Paul is in prison in Rome. While in prison he writes Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon (Acts 27-28).
- Sometime between AD 60 and 66 Paul is released from prison and resumes his travels in preparation to take the gospel to Spain. It is during this time that Paul writes 1 Timothy and Titus.
- Around AD 66 Paul is rearrested and is executed by AD 67. During this short second imprisonment, Paul writes 2 Timothy.

### **Paul and the Corinthians:**

- **First Visit** - Paul, on his second missionary journey, plants the churches in Corinth (Greece) in AD 50-52 (see Acts 18).

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- **First Letter** - Paul, probably on the third missionary journey, writes the Corinthians a short letter about sexual immorality in the church (see 1 Cor 5). Scholars call this letter "Corinthians A." That letter is now lost because Paul did not preserve it for us, though the contents of the letter are clearly explained in 1 Corinthians.
- **Second Letter** - Paul writes **1 Corinthians** on the third missionary journey from Ephesus in AD 53-54. 1 Corinthians is a follow-up to and expansion of Corinthians A.
- **Third Letter** - Paul gets word that the churches in Corinth are ignoring his teachings in 1 Corinthians, so he writes them a third letter. Paul calls this the "severe letter," and so do scholars (see 2 Cor 2 and 7). This letter also is now lost because Paul chose not to preserve it with his collection of letters. A brief summary of its contents is in 2 Corinthians.
- **Second Visit** - Paul visits Corinth to confront the churches on the problems there (see 2 Cor 2). Some scholars think this "painful visit" happens before the "severe letter" is sent.
- **Fourth Letter** - Paul writes **2 Corinthians** as an attempt to reconcile with the churches after his serious scolding of them. He is on his third missionary journey, probably in Macedonia around AD 54 or 55.
- **Third Visit** - Paul visits Corinth for a third time (see Acts 20).

### **A Note about the “Missing” Letters:**

We are, technically speaking, *missing* two Corinthian epistles. Don't be alarmed by this. There is no indication that these letters ever circulated anywhere outside of the Corinthian churches and their content is summarized in 1 and 2 Corinthians. All evidence points to the fact that Paul disposed of these two letters because they were very specific to the circumstances of the Corinthian church and unnecessary once 1 and 2 Corinthians were written.

### **Here is what Paul says about his recent travels in 1 Corinthians 16:5-9:**

**v. 5** - Paul plans to go back to Greece to visit them (Macedonia is northern Greece, just to the north of Corinth).

**v. 6** – Paul plans an extended stay, perhaps the whole winter.

**v. 6** – Paul wants to enlist the help of the Corinthians for his next missionary journey (to Spain by way of Rome).

**v. 7** – Paul does not want to breeze through Corinth. He wants to spend some quality time with them to disciple them.

**vs. 8-9** – Regardless, he plans to stay in Ephesus for the immediate future, because God is doing an important work there through him (though there are many adversaries).

Paul was a person who lived his life on mission for Jesus, and he constantly calls us to do the same. Paul prioritized people: the people that he is discipling into being Jesus’ followers, and the people who need to hear the gospel. Paul understood that discipleship and mission take plenty of time and energy, and he is willing to provide both. And Paul is not afraid to work through great adversity to follow Jesus and accomplish his mission.]

4. Verses 10 and 11 are not the first time Paul has mentioned Timothy. What do you know about Timothy from 1 Corinthians (4:14-21; 16:10-11)? What principles for Christian living can we discern from the way Paul talks about Timothy?

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[There are about two dozen mentions of Timothy in the New Testament. Six of them are in Acts 16-20. Additionally, Paul mentions Timothy in 1-2 Thessalonians (1 Th. 1:1, 3:2, 3:6; 2 Th. 1:1), 1-2 Corinthians (1 Cor. 4:17, 16:10; 2 Cor. 1:1, 1:19), Romans 16:21, Colossians 1:1, and Philippians 1:1, 2:19. Paul also wrote two letters to Timothy (1-2 Timothy) near the end of Paul's life.

These references and letters describe Timothy as a bi-racial believer (his father was a gentile from Lycaonia in Asia Minor, and his mother was Jewish) and missionary who was led to faith in Christ by Paul (or, at least he was disciplined into being a missionary by Paul). Timothy was quite young when he became a missionary, and he traveled with Paul and by himself doing missionary work. Here is what Paul says about Timothy in 1 Corinthians:

- **1 Corinthians 4:17** - Paul sent Timothy to the Corinthians because Timothy was an imitator of Paul and of Christ, and Timothy would be like a father to them.
- **1 Corinthians 4:17** – Timothy is beloved by Paul, and he is a faithful child in the Lord.
- **1 Corinthians 4:17** – Timothy is a faithful preacher as he reminds the Corinthians of Paul's ways in Christ.
- **1 Corinthians 16:10-11** – Timothy is a traveling missionary, and he is doing the work of the Lord.
- **1 Corinthians 16:11** – Timothy should not be despised (probably because of his youth—see 1 Timothy 4:12).

Work through these verses with your group and draw biblical principles from them. Here are a few to get you started: 1) God is calling us to imitate the missionaries and Apostles as they imitate Christ. 2) We are offered the faithfulness of Timothy (he was willing to risk his life for the cause of Christ) as a model to follow as we live our lives. 3) Regardless of our professions, we are to be “faithful preachers” of Christ wherever we find ourselves. 4) We should spend our days, as we live our “normal” lives, doing the work of the Lord. 5) Whether or not we are still young, we should strive to serve the Lord with such fervor and expertise that the people around us are amazed at the goodness of God in our lives.]

### **Application of the Biblical Text**

1. This week memorize 1 Corinthians 16:13-14: “Be watchful. Stand firm in the faith. Act like adults. Be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.”
2. Keep up with our annual Bible reading plan this week. If you have fallen behind, pick up where we are right now. You can always go back and read what you've missed as you have time.
3. If a Christian in your Life Group told you they didn't think that giving money to the work of Christ (church, missionaries, etc.) was important for Christians to do, how would you respond? How would 1 Corinthians 16 help you give a response?
4. What would you say are some of the biggest challenges for Christians who want to be generous with their money? How might you counsel someone to overcome these challenges?

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5. What would you say are some of the biggest challenges for Christians who want to be generous with their time? How might you counsel someone to overcome these challenges?