



Before I Go...

INTRODUCTION

1 Corinthians 16:1-24

The pastor's been preaching for a while, and then the final point flashes on the screen. Almost instinctively, the sound of rustling papers and Bibles closing fills the room as people start to mentally check out. We may be tempted to do the same as we open our Bibles to the closing chapter of 1 Corinthians. After 29 small group gatherings, we've walked through this rich letter together—encountering some of our favorite passages, wrestling with challenging truths, and striving to apply its lessons to our lives. It's been a journey, and it might feel like we're at the "logistical wrap-up" stage. But don't check out just yet!

While it's true that Paul is drawing this letter to a close, the things he shares here are far from insignificant. In fact, they're essential. Throughout this letter, Paul has addressed the church's weaknesses and shortcomings head-on, teaching us valuable lessons about what it means for a church to be firing on all cylinders. Now, as he wraps up, Paul offers practical pictures of what it looks like to love and care for one another in the church. He doesn't leave these brothers and sisters beat up and defeated. Instead, he offers encouragement to lift them up and help them move forward.

Let's take one more look together and see how Paul's final words can inspire us to press on in faith, love, and community.

BREAK THE ICE

What's your go-to feel-good song or movie when you need a pick-me-up?

READ IT

Read 1 Corinthians 16:1-24

EXPLORE IT

1. What instructions does Paul give the Corinthians regarding “the collection for the saints”?
2. Who does Paul mention will be visiting the Corinthians at some point?
3. What is Paul’s charge to the Corinthians in verses 13-14?
4. What does Paul commend people for in verses 15-18?
5. Who sends greetings to the Corinthians?

APPLY IT

Generosity

Paul encourages the Corinthian believers to give “as he may prosper.” While Paul doesn’t specify a particular amount or percentage, this phrase clearly implies a planned and proportional approach to giving that reflects one’s income. Rather than using Paul’s lack of mention of percentages as an excuse to give less than the tithe (a tenth) required under the Old Testament Law, grace should compel us to ask, “How much can I give?”—not, “How little must I give?”

6. How can we cultivate a heart of generosity that sees giving as an opportunity instead of an obligation?

7. What do you think a church community would look like if everyone embraced the mindset of asking, 'How much can I give?' instead of 'How little must I give?'?

"There are three important words not to be missed in verse 2: **"each of you."** ... Paul makes it plain that everybody should give something to this offering. There is no room for exemptions, exceptions, or excuses. Nobody gets a pass. Nobody gets a get-out-of-giving card. When it comes to giving, we are to participate whether we are rich or poor, whether the offering looks like a gold coin from a rich man or a little mite from a widow (Mare and Harris, 1 & 2 Corinthians, 121).

I have discovered that Christian givers typically fall into three categories.

- **Spontaneously:** When presented with a cause or an emergency or something that burdens them, they will give. That is one way to give, and some giving should be spontaneous, but I think there is room for improvement here.
- **Sporadically:** They just give when the mood hits them. So depending on their frame of mind, the performance of the stock market, how high or low interest rates are, or how much confidence they have in the economy, they give. Here, too, I see room for improvement, and I think Paul would agree.
- **Sparingly:** For many of them, giving is not generous or sacrificial; they just want that good feeling that comes from knowing they have at least given something.

The best way to give, though it may certainly be supplemented with spontaneous offerings, is **systematically**. We should give with a steadfast determination to give as often as our income is refreshed or we have an unexpected inflow of money. We should have a steadfast determination to give some portion of that back to God's work and to people who are more needy than we are. Though there may be times to give beyond this pattern, we should have a system of calculating what we are going to give ahead of time, where we are going to give it, and when we are going to give it." ²⁰

8. Why do you think all Christians are called to show generosity to the ministry of the church and support of others?

²⁰ Akin, Dr. Daniel L.; Merritt, James. Exalting Jesus in 1 Corinthians (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (pp. 301-302). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

9. Which of the models of generosity listed above most resembles your current approach to generosity? Why do you think that is?

10. What steps can you take to move toward a “systematic” approach to your generosity?

11. What challenges or barriers might you face when working to implement a more systematic approach to generosity?

Comradery

This letter was undoubtedly a challenging one for Paul to write and a difficult one for the Corinthians to receive. The issues in Corinth must have felt overwhelming, with fires to put out in every direction. From divisions in the church to tolerance of sin, godly sexuality, the proper use of liberties and love, issues surrounding the Lord's Supper, spiritual gifts and worship, and even doctrinal clarity on the resurrection, the scope of correction could easily leave someone feeling discouraged. Yet Paul doesn't let the letter end on a low note. Instead, he reminds the Corinthians of his deep love for them and their vital place in the broader Church.

Paul encourages them by sharing his plans to visit soon and his decision to send Timothy in the meantime. Despite all their struggles and missteps, Paul hadn't given up on them. What a powerful reminder that, even with significant work ahead, he was committed to walking alongside them as they grew in faith. This reassurance offers hope: no matter how messy things might get, God's work continues, and there's always room for growth and renewal.

12. What is your typical response when someone addresses something in your life that needs correction?

13. Thinking of a time when despite your own shortcomings, someone didn't give up on you and instead continued to invest into your life. What kind of impact did that kind of partnership and relationship have in shaping who you are today?

- 14. When you have to lovingly correct something in another person's life, how can you balance criticism and correction with grace and encouragement?**

In verses 13-14, Paul offers a heartfelt encouragement to these struggling Christians, as though putting his arm around them and saying, "Don't give up. Keep going." He urges them to "stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love." What a powerful reminder of the strength and love we are called to in Christ!

In our own moments of struggle and discouragement, it's a profound blessing when a brother or sister in Christ comes alongside us, offering support and reminding us to keep going.

- 15. How have you experienced the love and support of other believers through discouragements and frustrations either in life or in your own faith journey?**

- 16. What area of your faith and life do you need to apply Paul's words to "be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong"?**

It's often said that you can't "John Wayne" Christianity—our faith was never meant to be lived out alone. God designed it to flourish in the community of other believers. Even amidst the struggles in the Corinthian church, there were bright spots that Paul didn't overlook. The household of Stephanas stood out as faithful, devoted, and seasoned believers, setting an example the church could confidently follow. Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus were a great blessing to Paul and others, and their ministry and service to the Lord were worthy of commendation.

This serves as a great reminder that, even when challenges arise—whether in the church or in our personal faith—there are always reasons to rejoice and praise God.

17. How has someone else's example and ministry encouraged you?

How can you "give recognition to such people"?