

Get Out There!



Topic

Stewardship opportunities

Theme

Every member of team church should faithfully take advantage of stewardship opportunities.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will prayerfully determine how he might participate in the Lord's work through giving and serving.

Materials

- Resources 1 and 16

Scripture Focus

1 Corinthians 16

Summary

Every member of team church should view his life as a stewardship privilege and responsibility. He ought to submit his money, time, and efforts to God, trusting God to use them for His glory. Every believer is responsible to get out there and participate as a good steward of Christ.

Outline

I. Stewardship of Money (16:1–4)

- A. Give regularly (16:1, 2)
- B. Give personally (16:2)
- C. Give proportionately (16:2)
- D. Give responsibly (16:3, 4)

II. Stewardship of Opportunities (16:5–9)

- A. Open doors (16:5–9a)
- B. Opposition (16:9b)

III. Stewardship of Testimony (16:10–24)

- A. Paul's commendations (16:10–18)
- B. Paul's conclusion (16:19–24)

Memory Verse

"Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come"
(1 Corinthians 16:2).

GETTING STARTED

Passing the Plate

ASK: What do you think about as the offering plate goes through your row?

ASK: Do you view the offering as a time of worship and an opportunity to express your gratitude to God? Explain.

Paul addressed giving in the last chapter of his letter to the Corinthians. His brief instructions help us to consider our own giving practices.

An Open Door

ASK: Do you believe that God has ever opened a door of opportunity specifically for you? What was your response? Did you follow through and pursue the opportunity?

ASK: Did you ever go through a door that you thought at the time was opened by the Lord only to later regret having entered that door? What was unique or different about any of those circumstances?

Paul addressed the stewardship of opportunities in the final notes to the church at Corinth.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Paul believed the doctrine of the resurrection had practical implications for Christian living. Because Christ arose, we ought to serve Him fervently and faithfully (1 Cor. 15:58) and consider all of life a stewardship to be lived for Christ. That stewardship, of course, involves the money and resources God has entrusted to us.

I. Stewardship of Money (1 Cor. 16:1–4)

Some believers bristle at the topic of the stewardship of money, but it ought to be a welcome subject. Being a good steward of God's resources is a privilege.

A. Give regularly (16:1, 2)

The Christians in Jerusalem had fallen upon hard times. They were poverty-stricken and persecuted. So Paul launched a fund drive for them. He wrote to the Corinthian church, *Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye* (16:1).

The collection was to be built by offerings given *upon the first day of the week* (16:2). By following this procedure, the Corinthian Christians would avoid the necessity of taking a last-minute offering when Paul arrived (16:2b). This disciplined pattern of giving shows us how to give. We ought to give regularly to support the Lord's work.

ASK: What might have been Paul's reason for not wanting the church to collect

funds during his visit? (Q3) *Perhaps his presence would have made their giving obligatory rather than voluntary.*

B. Give personally (16:2)

No Christian is exempt from the privilege and responsibility of giving to the Lord's work. Paul told the Corinthian church, *Let every one of you lay by him in store* (16:2).

If anyone considers himself too poor to give, he should consider the condition of the poor widow who dropped all she had into the temple treasury. Jesus did not say she was too poor to give, but rather commended her. He explained that *she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living* (Mark 12:44).

ASK: Since God does not need anything, why does He ask His people to give? (Q4) *It is a way for us to express our love for God. It causes us to recognize our dependence on Him to meet our needs. Giving also reduces the temptation of materialism and greed.*

C. Give proportionately (16:2)

The Lord is more concerned about our motive for giving than the amount of our gifts. Second Corinthians 9:7 indicates that we should give *not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver*. Giving reveals our gratitude to the Lord for His blessings (2 Cor. 8:7), and it measures our love (16:24).

Paul did not mention the tithe in 1 Corinthians 16. Instead, he instructed that a Christian's guideline for giving should be *as God hath prospered him* (16:2). Giving, then, should be proportionate, but surely one would do well to meet or exceed the basic ten percent required under the Old Testament law (Lev. 27:30).

READ: 1 Corinthians 16:2. **ASK:** What might be some reasons that people do not give proportionately? (Q5) *They may feel unable to do so due to the pressures of debt and other obligations; they may not feel confident in giving to the church they are associated with; or they may be untaught in a Biblical approach to finances.*

D. Give responsibly (16:3, 4)

At this early date in church history, Paul set high standards for how church funds should be collected, handled, distributed, and accounted for (16:3, 4). He wanted to make sure that handling offering money would not disgrace his apostolic ministry.

Like Paul, a church ought to be wise in its practice of collecting and disbursing the freewill offerings of a church. The members ought to adopt a budget, share the responsibility of meeting it, and select responsible and highly respected individuals to handle the offerings. Meticulous records, kept up-to-date by financial officers and reported accurately and regularly to the church, will safeguard not only the money but also the reputations of those who handle it.

ASK: What safeguards might a church put in place to ensure integrity in handling finances? (Q6) *Have more than one person responsible for counting an*

offering. Set limits on who has access to funds. Develop an approval and accounting procedure for spending church funds.

ASK: Why should a church consider seeking help with financial processes and procedures? (Q7) *Church finances can be complicated. The church's reputation is on the line. Not every church has a qualified volunteer.*

II. Stewardship of Opportunities (16:5–9)

A. Open doors (16:5–9a)

According to 1 Corinthians 16:5–7a, Paul hoped to visit Corinth and spend the winter there. He submitted the matter to the Lord's will (16:7b). Until Pentecost, however, he planned to stay at Ephesus (16:8). He recognized the Lord had given him a wide-open door of ministry at Ephesus, where he was when he wrote this letter. He wanted to act as a wise steward of the opportunity (16:9a).

RESOURCE: Display resource 16. **ASK:** What open opportunities for service do we have in our church and in our neighborhoods? (Q8) (Reveal or record answers.)

Paul understood that opportunity is one of the great spiritual treasures God gives us. Every opportunity offers the possibility to accomplish something of eternal value, so Paul approached every open door as a portico to a new adventure with the Lord (cf. 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3).

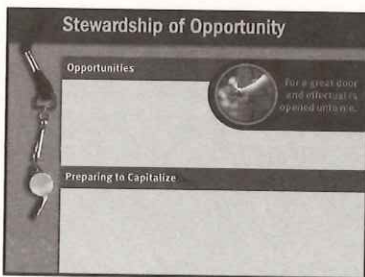
Paul also knew that in God's economy every opportunity is part of the stewardship for which we *shall give account to . . . God* (Rom. 14:12; cf. Luke 12:48). With a vision of the awaiting Judgment Seat of Christ clear in his mind, Paul did not want to miss, lose, or waste even one opportunity (9:24–27).

Like Paul, every believer receives opportunities to minister for the Lord. An opportunity may be as close as next door, where a spiritually hungry neighbor resides. It may be a Sunday School classroom, where a teaching ministry is available. It may be an opportunity to show kindness or an opportunity for personal spiritual growth. Opportunity may even take the form of a new job or an occasion to obtain additional education. A wise believer will seize the open door and rely upon God to accomplish His will in it.

Churches also have many opportunities for ministry (cf. Rev. 3:8). Visitors walk through their doors, people in their community get sick or hungry, nursing homes need volunteers to conduct chapel services, and missionaries encounter special needs. A church characterized by good stewardship will grab hold of such opportunities under the direction of the Spirit.

There is a harsh reality to the issue of opportunity, however. When an opportunity is lost, it may be gone forever. Christ reinforced the urgency of opportunity repeatedly to the seven churches in the book of Revelation. Several decades after Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus and contemplated his further ministry there, the risen Christ told the Ephesian church: *Repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent* (Rev. 2:5).

Regarding his next trip to Corinth, Paul ultimately altered his agenda. He discussed that and the reaction that it drew in 2 Corinthians 1:15–24.



Occasionally, even a good sports team loses a game because of failed opportunities. *We should have won*, a coach or his players will say, *but we didn't take advantage of the opportunities*. It is nothing short of tragic if a church squanders its opportunities to serve the Lord successfully.

ASK: What keeps you from taking advantage of spiritual opportunities? (Q9)

Perhaps fear of the unknown or complacency with current circumstances.

RESOURCE: Display resource 16. **ASK:** What does it take for a church to be a winning team, capitalizing on every opportunity the Lord gives? (Q10) (Reveal or record answers.) *It takes a common goal, cooperation, obedience to the Word of God, a Scriptural plan, love for the lost, and the development and use of spiritual gifts.*

B. Opposition (16:9b)

Paul knew well that the Devil opposes believers who seize opportunities for serving the Lord (cf. 1 Pet. 5:8, 9). He told the Corinthians, *A great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries* (1 Cor. 16:9).

As every spiritual leader can attest, there is constant opposition to any attempt at making progress in Christian life and ministry. There will always be enemies of the gospel, naysayers, hindrances, and obstacles. But these must never become excuses for failing to attempt some spiritual accomplishment—or there will never be any accomplishment at all (cf. Prov. 22:13; 26:13).

ASK: How might Satan oppose a church that is seizing opportunities for service? (Q11) *He might cause division in the church to distract it from its mission. He might tempt members to sin and disqualify them for service. He might cause members to become jealous or proud and undermine the ministry.*

We can expect the Devil to oppose us when we step through doors of opportunity that the Lord has placed before us. We must be aware of his opposition and seek to strengthen ourselves spiritually.

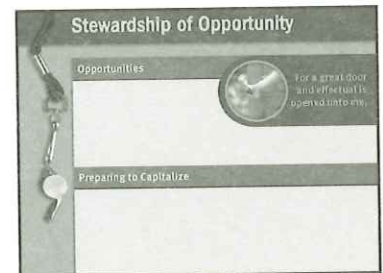
II. Stewardship of Testimony (16:10–24)

Faithful believers formed a team with Paul to help him do the work of the ministry. And just as a knowledgeable, humble team leader praises the performance of his teammates, so Paul praised his coworkers.

A. Paul's commendations (16:10–18)

BIBLE STUDY: Ask the learners to form small groups. Each group will study 1 Corinthians 16:10–18 and prepare a brief report that tells something about each Christian worker Paul identified. The group should also suggest what we can learn from the workers about serving the Lord. Allow about five minutes for the group Bible study.

Foremost among Paul's group of disciples and workers was Timothy, with whom he shared a lasting bond (cf. 2 Tim. 2:2). *Let no man therefore despise him*, Paul told the Corinthians (1 Cor. 16:11). Though Timothy was relatively young in



years, he was spiritually mature and a great resource for the Corinthian church.

Apollos, whose following in the Corinthian church was significant (cf. 1:12), decided not to go to Corinth despite Paul's counsel. God had apparently opened other doors for Apollos. And perhaps Apollos wanted to avoid stirring up the divisions that the Corinthians believers had formed (cf. 2:4–7).

Paul interrupted his commendations to give a brief but powerful admonition. He commanded the Corinthians to *watch . . . stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong* (16:13). He wanted team church to obey his instructions and to do so with love (16:14). We might liken these two verses to an inspired halftime speech a coach gives to a team that has played horribly and needs to come together for a chance to win. Corinth needed to get their heads in the game, pull together as a team, play hard, and win.

Finally, Paul was thankful that Stephanas (1:16), Fortunatus, and Achaicus came to Ephesus to help him (16:15–18). They refreshed his spirit in the Lord, a bright spot for a church that was out of bounds in so many ways.

ASK: What can we learn from Paul's appreciation for his coworkers? (Q12)

The ministry is never a one-man operation. Even God's greatest servants need others to join them in advancing the work.

B. Paul's conclusion (16:19–24)

Paul was joined by a host of believers in greeting the Corinthian church. He named Aquila and Priscilla, a husband-and-wife team of Christian servants who had opened their home in Ephesus as a place where Christians worshiped and fellowshiped (16:19). This godly couple, originally from Rome, had left Rome when Emperor Claudius ordered the expulsion of Jews from the city. Next, they settled in Corinth, where Paul first met them and resided with them (Acts 18:2). Later, they moved to Ephesus, where they joined Paul here in conveying their goodwill back to Corinth. Finally, after the death of Claudius, they moved back to Rome (Rom. 16:3). Aquila and Priscilla maintained an outstanding testimony wherever they lived. Their example ought to inspire Christian couples today to devote their hearts and homes to the Lord.

All the Christians at Ephesus sent greetings to the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 16:20a). The bonds of Christian love spanned the many miles between the two communities and underscored the truth that Christians are one in Christ.

Greet ye one another with an holy kiss, Paul told the Corinthians (16:20b). Today, a handshake is the cultural equivalent to the Corinthians' *holy kiss*, which merely signified friendship. The Corinthians had alienated and avoided one another. They had quarreled over leadership and practices. It was time for them to show appropriate affection to one another. It is often the case, though, that a church is on shaky ground when its members refuse to shake hands with one another.

The matters contained in the Corinthian letter were so important that Paul signed his name to it (16:21). No one could dispute the letter's authority when they saw his name affixed to it.

Finally, Paul closed the letter with a warning and a benediction. The Christians were to consider as *anathema* (16:22), or *accursed*, any person who would

love not the Lord Jesus Christ.

Maranatha, Paul added, meaning, *the Lord is coming*, or *come, Lord* (cf. Rev. 22:20). Paul was anticipating the Lord's return for believers and His judgment on the enemies of the gospel at His coming.

Maranatha is a word of hope that reminds us to be ready to meet the Lord at all times. If we do not know where to start preparing for the day of His return, the book of 1 Corinthians certainly gives us much material to consider.

ASK: Knowing the Lord may return soon, what admonitions in 1 Corinthians do you need to heed? (Q13)

First Corinthians closes on a bright, positive note. The Corinthians needed help from their merciful Lord to work through their problems. So Paul prayed, *the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you* (16:23). Also, the Corinthians needed to know that Paul loved them despite the serious tone of his letter, so he wrote as his final words in 1 Corinthians, *My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen* (16:24).

May God help us to continually study and learn from this all-important epistle and then implement its truths in our lives until Christ returns.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Stewardship of Finances

ASK: If everyone in your church followed your pattern for giving, how would your church do financially? (Q14)

ASK: What adjustments do you need to make to your attitude toward giving financially? (Q15)

ASK: What adjustments do you need to make to your practice of giving? (Q16)

Stewardship of Opportunities

ASK: How often do you think about the ministry opportunities God is bringing your way? (Q17)

Encourage your learners to regularly look for what God is doing and for ways they can be involved.

ASK: What opportunities do you have before you now that you will take advantage of? (Q18)

Summary and Memory Verse

Use resource 1 to review the response for this lesson: Give faithfully to the Lord's work.

Encourage your learners to memorize 1 Corinthians 16:2. Give them an opportunity to quote the verse in class next week.

