



## **1 Corinthians 16:1-12**

### **“Church Money And Church Politics”**

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### **“Following Christ From City Center!”**

I CORINTHIANS 16:1-12 "CHURCH MONEY AND CHURCH POLITICS"

**A. vv.1-4 CONCERNING THE CONTRIBUTION FOR JERUSALEM. 10 GUIDES**

1 "NOW CONCERNING" ( Greek *peri de*) the contribution for the saints": A GOD-GIVEN TASK (1)  
 as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. LEADERSHIP, CHURCH WIDE (2)  
 Severe Drought Began In Palestine, 46A.D.  
 2 On the first day of the week (i.e. Sunday), Earliest Reference, RESURRECTION WORSHIP (3)  
 each of you is to put something aside and store it up, VOLUNTARY, PERSONAL, SYSTEMATIC (4)  
 as he may prosper, NOT ALL EQUAL AMOUNTS, PROPORTIONAL (5)  
 so that contributions need not be made when I come. NOT LAST MINUTE, UNDER DURESS (6)  
 3 And when I arrive, CREDIBILITY AND INTEGRITY (7)  
 I will send those whom *you* accredit by letter to carry *your* gift to Jerusalem. Visit The Mother Church  
 4 If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me. CONSENSUS/ PARTICIPATION (8)  
 2 Cor. 8-9, Gal. 2:1-10, Rom. 15:22-33, Acts 24:17

**B. vv.5-9 PAUL'S TRAVEL PLANS (Work and Money).**

5 1 I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, Paul's Plans Were Tentative  
 for I intend to pass through Macedonia, KEEP PEOPLE INFORMED (9)  
 and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, c. April - November  
 so that you may **speed me on my journey**, wherever I go. Nov. - Jan., Sea Travel Impossible  
 6 For I do not want to see you just now in passing; Speed = (\$ Help)  
 7 I hope to spend some time with you if the Lord permits. 4:8-21, Acts 20:3  
 4:19, Divine Qualification  
 8 2 But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, c. April, Paul Has Plans/ Time Line  
 9 for a wide door for **effective work** has opened to me, Effective Work (Motivation)  
 and there are many adversaries. Spiritual Opposition (Expected)  
 2 Cor. 2:2, Col. 4:3, Riot in Acts 19:23-20:1

**B' vv.10-11 TIMOTHY'S TRAVEL PLANS (Work and Money).**

10 2' When (if) Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, STEWARDSHIP OF PEOPLE, DEVELOPMENT (10)  
 for he is doing **the work of the Lord**, as I am. 4:17, Shield From Cliques  
 11 So let no one despise him. Mentoring Work Of The Lord  
 Hot Letter/ Attack Paul, Affirmed Younger Leaders  
 2 Cor. 1:19, Acts 18:5, Acts 19:33 (Emergency)  
 1' **Speed him on his way in peace**, Timothy Took 1 Cor. With Him As Paul's Agent  
 that he may return to me; Speed (\$ Help)  
 for I am expecting him with the brethren.

Plans Of vv.5ff. Changed, Interrupted By *Painful Visit*, 2 Cor. 2:1

**A' v.12 CONCERNING APOLLOS (PAUL'S COLLEAGUE).**

12 "NOW CONCERNING" our brother Apollos," New Topic, Acts 18:24-28  
 1:12, Was Paul Under Suspicion For Hindering Apollos?  
 I strongly urged him to visit you with the other brethren, Access To Multiple Leaders & Teachers  
 but it was not at all the will for him to come now. Disappointed Timothy Coming And Not Apollos?  
 He will come when he has opportunity.

MISSIONAL AND FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF PASTORS AND LEADERS	
v.1	Keep the church informed of the needs and teach about principles of giving.
vv.3-4	Insure credibility and integrity.
v.8	Be open to God's openings and providence for effective work.
v.10	Do the work of the Lord yourself and along with others.
vv.10-12	Support colleagues and train successors by highlighting their contributions.
MISSIONAL AND FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF CHURCH MEMBERS	
v.1	Follow their leaders in the support of evangelism, discipleship, and missions.
v.2	See ministry funding as an act of worship. Be systematic- have a plan for giving. Give proportionally. Avoid a "last minute" mentality.
vv.3-4	Insure adequate safeguards and internal financial controls to avoid misunderstandings.
vv.10-11	Respect and support those who carry the weight of the work.

## CHURCH MONEY AND CHURCH POLITICS

*“...for a wide door for effective work has opened to me,  
and there are many adversaries.”*

The two are always found together: divine opportunity and significant resistance.

### I C O R I N T H I A N S 1 6 : 8 b

**F**our friends played poker on Thursdays nights, but this week they played on Saturday, and what a game it was. All night long, toasting the winner after each deal. Finally, morning came and the party broke up. As they were headed home, they drove past Main Street Church and felt a twinge of conscience over the night’s activities, so they decided to go in. Not quite sober, they sang with great fervor. And when the offering was taken, they sought penance by each dropping a hundred dollar bill in the plate. Afterwards, Pastor Phil- a bit puzzled about the visitors- asked Billy Tunstall if he knew the generous Greenwoodians. “Never seen ‘em before,” he replied, “they sang like Methodists alright, but they gave like Roman Catholics and smelled like Episcopalians.”

It was stewardship season at the Main Street Church, and Pastor Phil had set aside three weeks to warm the congregation up for Consecration Sunday on November 4.

It was little Susie's fifth birthday, and her father- who was trying to teach her the discipline of tithing- gave her ten crisp dollar bills as a gift. He counted them slowly into her little hands, nine in the left palm, one in the right, "You can do anything with the nine that you wish," he said, "but save one dollar (a tenth) to give to God's work on Sunday."

Sounded like a good deal to Susie, nine for her and one for God. Her next question was, "Can we go to the mall today?"

"Sure," her father replied.

All the way there she chattered about all she would buy- the money held tightly in her fist. As she skipped across the parking lot, she tripped and fell. As the wind blew one of the dollars into a storm drain, her father heard her say, "Well, Lord, there goes your dollar."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Green, *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990), 159.

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## I Corinthians 16:1-12 ..... 4

It was stewardship season at Main Street Church, and Pastor Phil had set aside three weeks to warm the congregation up for Consecration Sunday on November 4.

It was stewardship season in the Corinthian Church, a church Paul founded only a few years before. There were a few Jews in the congregation; they understood the biblical principles of tithing off the top and stewarding the rest under the Lord's watchful eye, but most were of former pagans who had no teaching on giving as part of discipleship. To follow Jesus is to become a glad and generous giver. Not until the end of the letter does Paul turn to issues of giving, stewardship, and missions. There were lots of *hot buttons* to deal with in teaching these converts how to live the new life- like why not to get drunk at the communion meal, why not to visit brothels, why not to sue one another in civil courts- but their instruction would not be complete without practical instruction on giving and the way the church does its business and handles money for the sake of the mission.

Since the 1940s, the Ad Council has been the leading producer of public service TV ads. The *Don't Almost Give* from several years ago campaign has been particularly potent.

You've seen them. One shows a man with crutches struggling up a flight of stairs. The narrator says, "This is a man who *almost* learned to walk at a rehab center that almost got built by people who *almost* gave money." After a pause, he continues: "Almost gave. How good is *almost* giving? About as good as *almost* walking."

A second shows a homeless man curled up on a pile of rags, a ratty bed sheet his covering. "This is Jack Thomas," the voice announces, "Someone *almost* brought him something to eat; someone *almost* brought him to a shelter; someone else *almost* brought Jack a warm blanket." After a pause, the voice asks, "And Jack Thomas? Well, he *almost* made it through the night." Each ends with a direct message: "Don't *almost* give. Give."<sup>2</sup>

The Apostle Paul could have written those ads. Chapter 16 of I Corinthians opens with an update on a disaster relief offering, "Now concerning the contribution for the saints," meaning the *poor Christians* in the mother church of Jerusalem who'd been living with the effects of a long drought. Paul wanted everyone to give, not *almost give*, and to give in a way that would cut a new groove into their habits. Giving is not automatic; you have to teach people to give by clear instruction and good modeling.

In the first four verses Paul unpacks eight guidelines for Christian giving. And the first we've already touched on. Make the need known for a God-given task, "Now concerning the contribution for the saints..." "Now concerning the Greenwood food

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<sup>2</sup> PreachingToday.com search under *stewardship*. Ads can be seen on YouTube.

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## I Corinthians 16:1-12 ..... 5

bank....” “Now concerning maintenance on the Main Street building....” “Now concerning our missionaries and apportionments.” The job of leadership is to announce needs without apology, and this church has many needs and many opportunities.

Some years before I Corinthians was written there was a major dispute between the church in Antioch of Syria- which was committed to reaching Gentiles as well as Jews- and the mother church in Jerusalem where some thought Gentiles should first become Jews as part of their conversion: first be circumcised, keep a kosher kitchen, obey the whole law of Moses, then follow Jesus as a good Jew. The Jerusalem Council, whose minutes are found in Acts 15, opted for the more open position. Gentiles can believe in Jesus, have the full benefits of knowing him, not be circumcised, still eat ham, and keep only enough of the law to allow fellowship with their Jewish brothers and sisters. In other words, you don't have to become culturally Jewish first before becoming a Christian, but you do have to give up the many gods of your history for the one true God of Israel and stop all forms of sexual immorality. Jesus is not to be added to a longer list of deities, and the moral law still holds.

Now if the decision had gone the other way, none of us would be here today. Salvation would have been limited to Gentiles who were first willing to become full-fledged Jews, and that would have been almost none. The *come-to-Jesus* movement would never have gotten out of Palestine. No one has to change their ethnic identity to become a Christian. You don't have to become *something else* before you become a follower; Jesus takes us as we are. Bikers can stay bikers; good-ole-boys can stay good ole boys; elites can stay sophisticated as long as they do not despise the poor. Secondary issues must not displace primary. Over time Jesus sorts out your history: what may be kept and what must be culled. All cultures are welcome in this family. It's what the word *catholic* in the Apostles' Creed means; it means *universal, for all people groups*.

One stipulation of the Jerusalem agreement, however, was that the churches under Paul's leadership offer financial aid to the poor Christians in Jerusalem. "Yes," said Paul, "that is appropriate; it is from Jerusalem that the faith has come in the first place; we all have a debt to discharge." A severe famine came to Palestine in the year 46A.D. and lasted for years; on top of that the mother church went through persecution. The Jerusalem church was under great stress, and it was up to her far-flung children to send an offering to momma!

In a certain sense that is still our relationship to the larger church of which we are a part. We did not create this grand faith; it was preserved and passed on to us through the church that was there before us, and giving is one way to honor that relationship. We receive spiritual benefit; we respond financially. So the first principle of giving is educational. Christians are to give to other Christians in need, and it is the responsibility of

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**I Corinthians 16:1-12 ..... 6**

leaders to make the need known so plans can be made and offerings taken. A chunk of our yearly budget here at Main Street goes to ministries beyond our local church. Lots of money passes through our hands on the way to other places, and that is a sign of health.. In this I am following the example of the Apostle Paul who was not only a great evangelist and theologian but a great fund-raiser, “Now concerning the contribution for the saints....”

The spiritual renaissance I pray and work for means we will raise and spend lots of money without apology. Two primary forms of energy in a church are prayer and money, and neither is a substitute for the other. They are in fact two complimentary forms of one thing that is finally real, and that is love. When we love, we pray; and when we love, we give. They are two strong hands working together. When you do tax planning, include your church in you will. An enormous inter-generational transfer of wealth is now going on between the World War II generation and the Baby Boomers. Don’t give it all to your children! Put your church in the income stream; keep on giving after you die! We have a well-conceived foundation prepared to welcome and wisely use such gifts.

You will miss a wonderful opportunity for Christian witness if your will is merely a legal thing. Give at least ten percent of your net worth at death to the cause of Christ through your church. Consider a double tithe. When your heirs gather in the law office and the will is unsealed, let all know that mom or dad was a believer in Christ and the work of his church. Give your family more than a legacy; give them a spiritual heritage. It is your last chance to give a testimony to the faithfulness of God in your life. So don’t *almost* give; give! Give of your regular income through at least ten percent. Give thank offerings beyond that. Then, mark your death in the faith with a legacy gift so the giving goes on after you are gone.

This appeal in Paul’s case was not for the church budget but for a special offering. But then that’s always the easiest money to raise. People respond to crisis calls which stir emotions. What’s more difficult is the unglamorous giving: keeping up with budget and all it takes for us to be church week after week.

When the Rheims Cathedral in France was being rebuilt, John D. Rockefeller give a large gift, and with the gift came a note, "Use it in the *unseen parts* of the work, for you will find enough people who want to give their money for what can be seen."<sup>3</sup>

I thank God for designated giving and unexpected gifts attached to little brass plaques. I thank God even more for steady givers and tithers who week in and week give undesignated

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<sup>3</sup> Green, *Illustrations*, 147.

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## I Corinthians 16:1-12 ..... 7

and- when absent- bring a check by during the week. Special projects are easy giving; regular giving is faithful giving. Principle one is for pastors to make the need known. If you want a great church; become great givers, and- as Jesus said- your heart will follow your dollars, "For where your treasure is," he said, "there will your heart be also."<sup>4</sup>

Principle two is for the preacher not to flinch or be hesitant about direct advice. Paul wrote in the second half of verse 1, "...as I directed the churches of Galatia, *so you also are to do.*" I sense no apology in Paul's voice. Part of his pastoral duty was to teach giving in all the churches he led. Peter Wagner writes:

"Preachers who are embarrassed about asking their people for money are not nurturing the flock properly. They, by their actions and attitudes, show that they do not really believe that it is more blessed to give than to receive."<sup>5</sup>

Paul was clear in verse 1 about what duty demands, "...as I directed the churches of Galatia, *so you also are to do.*" Without apology, I ask you to catch up if you are behind and to give to God for the upcoming year 2013 by making a written commitment on Consecration Sunday. Don't just give, write it down. If you do, you will help us plan. What you give will greatly effect the quality of the ministry of your church and what we are able to do together.

At this point I want to give a practical aside. A tithe is not just another name for the word *gift*; a tithe is ten percent. Take your pay check and move the decimal point one place to the left. It's not higher math! But ten percent of what? We don't live in an ancient agricultural world or a simple barter economy. Salary, benefits, deferred compensation: it all gets complicated. So what is the base for the tithe? When people ask me I give a half-humorous reply, "Well, which do you want God to bless, the net or the gross?" We are to give to Caesar what is his through our taxes and faithful citizenship, which soon includes voting. Jesus also said we are to give to God what is God's, which mean first ourselves, then our substance as an extension of ourselves.

My counsel is this. A good guideline for beginners is that your after-tax income should be the basis of your tithe. Start there with ten percent, and if you cannot start there, at least move in the right direction. Start at some percentage which stretches you and move up a percentage point each quarter. If you start at three percent, in a year you will be at seven

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 6:21.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Wagner, *Effective Body Building* (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publications, 1982), 150,

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percent and by the following fall tithing. Make it a spiritual test. If you have children, share the decision with them. Ask them to help. See how God meets your needs and gives you a new appreciation for simplicity. I have never known a tither who regretted their decision. God loves a dare.<sup>6</sup> Tithing is one of the ways God draws us deeper into his work in our world. And sometimes extraordinary things happen.

The next four principles are compressed in verse 2:

- 3) "On the first day of the week (that's giving as worship on the day of Jesus' resurrection);
- 4) each of you is to put something aside and store it up (that's a systematic, and cumulative approach);
- 5) as he may prosper (not all give the same in dollar amounts);
- 6) so that contributions need not be made when I come" (that means no last-minute rush; no pressurized giving).

Why is it that we take up a collection during the worship service? Why not just put a box at the back or have people mail it in with monthly bills? Because giving is an act of worship. It's not dues for a religious club or church taxes. It's not buying God off or giving in order to get. Money is a representation of ourselves: our time, sweat and effort.

It is possible, I suppose, to give your money without giving yourself, and that is perhaps the most subtle perversion of giving, but at its best giving is self-offering. So Paul counsels them to do it "on the first day of week," on Sunday- the day of resurrection, the day Christians gather together for worship. Not *on pay day*, but on "the first day of the week" as an act of worship. Paul's desire was to build a habit and forge a living link between their meeting with the risen Lord and offering themselves in and through their gifts. Is the offering for you a holy moment of surrender and thanksgiving, or only an annoying interlude for collecting the green stuff? Rightly understood, giving is a profound act of worship, after which we stand to our feet and sing, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow...."

The next two principles are that giving is to be systematically planned and that not everyone gives the same amount, verse 2: "*each of you* is to put something aside and store

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<sup>6</sup> Malachi 3:7-12.

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## I Corinthians 16:1-12 ..... 9

it up, as he/she may prosper." *Everyone* is to give, *everyone* is to plan, and *everyone* is to give proportionally, "as he/she may prosper." Giving a set amount, say a thousand dollars, sounds like a lot of money. For all but the most modest incomes, however, it is far less than half the tithe. The poor are to give and learn to receive from God; the rich are to give and not think it buys them influence. When I see big houses and fancy cars and hear of fine vacations, I wonder, "Are they tithing, or are they tipping?"

When you go for a check-up, the doctor will poke, prod, and press various places, all the while asking, "Does this hurt?" If you cry out in pain, one of two things has happened. Either the doctor pushed too hard, or something's wrong, "We'd better do some more tests. It's not supposed to hurt there!" So it is when pastors preach on giving, and certain members cry out in discomfort, criticizing the message and the messenger. Either the pastor pushed too hard, or perhaps there's something wrong. In that case, I say, "My friend, we're in need of the Great Physician because it's not supposed to hurt there."<sup>7</sup> So if this message hurts, it may be that you have developed *sclerosis of the giver!* What a corny pun.

Don't kid yourself by the amount you give, particularly if you are prosperous. Look at the percentage; it is a truer indicator. "I am a three percent giver, or a five percent giver." You should know that number because it is the spiritually equivalent of your blood pressure or cholesterol, a vital sign. Of course, the amounts people give will differ, because, for a host of reasons, some make more than others. In the Corinthian church there were prosperous merchants and influential city officials, but also slaves with little or nothing to give. The amounts differed, but the standard was the same for all: giving was to be systematic, planned, and proportionate, an act of self-surrender in weekly worship.

It is often noted that Paul doesn't mention tithing explicitly in this passage, and I agree. It's not here. Which leaves two possibilities, both of which are arguments from silence. Either Paul as a Jew assumed ten percent as normative and the money for Jerusalem as *second-mile-missions* giving, or else he left the percentage to individual judgment under the guidance of the Spirit. I find myself stirred by the challenge of Peter Wagner:

"Ten percent is just a beginning. It is obligatory, even for Christians who consider themselves financially poor. Over and above that, Christians should add an offering. Most Christians I know in America should give around 12 percent of 15 percent of their incomes if they are serious about serving God.... As our income goes up, our percentage ought to go up as well.... If this

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<sup>7</sup> Modified from [www.sermonillustrations.com](http://www.sermonillustrations.com).

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**I Corinthians 16:1-12 ..... 10**

happened, more people would be won to Christ, more poor would be fed and clothed, and our churches would blossom like peach trees in springtime. God would be more pleased with us that he is at the present time."<sup>8</sup>

The sixth principle really appeals to me, and it is that the church hold the preacher accountable for teaching on stewardship but not for the administration or collection of the funds. Paul wanted it all done before he arrived, as he said at the end of verse 2, , "...so that contributions need not be made when I come." That was his wish.

Last minute pressure techniques take the joy out of ministry. You make my life easier when you follow these guidelines so that we don't have to make constant special appeals. I'm glad people catch up at the end of the year, but it does demonstrate *through-the-year* neglect, and it makes me wonder, "Why do they give in arrears and not off the top?" God and the church get leftovers as last in line. How is that a statement of faith? It isn't! Those who keep current on their giving free me and the Finance Committee from many worries. Whenever you get paid with a check or a bonus or a commission, that's the time to give. Make it a habit. Lori and I do. First Sunday every month. We are now giving above the tithe and happy about it. I refuse to let the national financial crisis make me fearful or for it to change my giving habits as a sign of my covenant with God.

The seventh principle, and perhaps the most important in our day, is that of integrity and accountability. Paul would not carry the money to Jerusalem by himself. He took great care to ensure fiduciary trust: verse 3, "But when I arrive, I will send those *whom you accredit* by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me."

This church is clean. Our books are open, as are our Finance and Board meetings. We issue statements to keep you informed. Our budget and updates are available. All our affairs are conducted in broad daylight. The only thing you can't know I who gives what. If you have questions, ask. Don't let rumor or suspicion be your guide. I trust the leaders of this church, and you should too. All churches receive and account for designated gifts. But in a healthy church where trust is high, there are fewer and fewer designated gifts because members care about the health of the church as a whole, not only their favorite project.

We want you to tithe and give offerings cheerfully because it's what God requires and because you know the money is being used wisely and well. But please don't tell me that the

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<sup>8</sup> Wagner, *Effective Body-Building*, 151-152.

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**I Corinthians 16:1-12 ..... 11**

church is a business; that is a trivial slogan for persons who are ignorant of the church's true nature and mission. We are not a business; we are the body of Christ, more a living organism than an organization. But I do agree that financial and legal affairs of the church ought to be conducted according to the highest standards of ethics and integrity. Some of our functions are like a business, but we are not a business. We are the church of God!

The ninth and tenth principles, and here the focus shifts from money to ministry, are found in verses 5 through 12. Here we find Paul's travel and ministry plans, as well as those of his staff: his junior associate Timothy and colleague Apollos. I note that Paul has a clear vision for what he wants to accomplish as revealed in the phrase "...for I intend to pass through Macedonia," but also that he is flexible and open to the unexpected, "and *perhaps* I will stay with you.... *I hope* to spend some time with you *if the Lord permits.*"

That is a sign of a mature leader. They have plans, but underneath is the realization that everything is finally "perhaps" and "I hope" and "if the Lord permits." As I recently reviewed my 2012 goals and objectives, I discovered that God has allowed me to accomplish much of what I envisioned, blocked me in some places, but also allowed me to accomplish some things I didn't even think of when the year began. Goal setting is important for us as a church, but we must always remains open to those times when God blocks our plans and redirects us to some new open door. Here is principle nine: if you expect people to give, keep them informed of what's going on so they have a sense of sharing in the victories.

People joke about ministers only working one day a week. But you'd be amazed to know what happens around here in the course of a week. I can't share all of it because much is in confidence. The people who drop by for an encouraging word because their lives are falling apart. Bible studies and small groups. An office that buzzes with staff and volunteer energy, phones that hardly ever stop ringing. If you are sitting on the sidelines without a role or task, then you have no idea what the beating heart of Main Street is like. Your pastor is a full time local missionary, in and outside this church. I work hard and love it.

So when I sit down to counsel a busted marriage or share Jesus Christ with a lost man or woman, when I write a book, I have no illusion I do it on my own. I am not a lone-ranger. I am under appointment and accountable for my ministry at multiple levels. I am here because the church ordained me to be in ministry in Christ's name at all times and in all places. About this church and this town and around the world I agree with Saint Paul, "an effective work has opened to me, *and there are many adversaries.*" Those two always go together, opportunity and problems, a chance to do something for Christ and the resistance of the Evil One and a fallen world. Remember that. There is no growth without spiritual and practical resistance, or- as a World War II B-25 pilot once told me, "If they're shootin' at

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## I Corinthians 16:1-12 ..... 12

you, Preacher, it means you're flyin' over the target."

Principle number ten is not so easily noticed. In the midst of a presentation on a special offering for Jerusalem, Paul mentions a junior and a senior co-worker, Timothy and Apollos. From this I draw the idea that stewardship is not only about money; it's also about developing and training people. Mission means fund-raising; it also means people-development. Paul brags on Timothy in verse 10, "When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, *for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am*. So let no one despise him." So the question is not only, *What* are you giving? but, *Who* are you developing?<sup>9</sup>

What we count and don't count says a lot about what we value. We are great at counting money; we are not so good at keeping tabs on how many new and younger leaders we are raising up because we give them significant challenges. I see a great need here at Main Street for a program of leader development, and I am addressing it in quality Bible studies, launching The Alpha ministry here and investing extra time with staff and leaders. We have financial needs for one and only one reason: because our business is making disciples for Jesus Christ. People matter. Developing leaders matters.

Here is the bottom line with which I think Paul would agree. Don't be a tipper; be a tither. At least make a strong move in the right direction, then adjust your life to make it stick. Honor God with the first fruits, whatever your income. Can I promise you riches with some *seed-faith, health-and-wealth* concept? No, first because its bad theology, and secondly because Lori refuses to get on of those big-hair arrangements as my side kick. What I can promise you that the ninety percent will go further with God's blessing that without it and that you will have put in place the single most important principle of financial management which is to honor God off the top, then manage the rest with God's wisdom. Even more, when real needs come, you can go to God with a clear conscience and pray boldly. God will also surprise you because your needs are known before you ask. Let this be the year your checkbook confesses your faith. Every Sunday put your buns in the pew, your bucks in the plate, and your best efforts under some local or foreign ministry. And you know what? Your heart will follow. "For where your treasure is," said Jesus, "there will your heart be also."<sup>10</sup> And isn't that what we all need- for God to have our hearts? I'm not trying to beat you out of something; I'm simply trying to get you in on life in the kingdom of God! Live at its center, not at the far edges!

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<sup>9</sup> See Randy Reese and Robert Loane, *Deep Mentoring: Guiding Others on Their Leadership Journey* (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 6:21.

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**I Corinthians 16:1-12 ..... 13**

It was our own John Wesley who summed up the biblical ethic of stewardship in three memorable phrases, "*Earn* all you can. *Save* all you can. *Give* all you can." Many know these words, and many practice the first two. Many work hard; many save and invest in hopes of financial freedom and life without worries. Far fewer know Wesley's comment on the relation of giving to earning and saving. He writes, "When a man (or woman) becomes a Christian, he (they) becomes industrious, trustworthy and prosperous. Now, if that man, when he gets all he can and saves all he can, does not give all he can, I have more hope for Judas Iscariot than for that man"<sup>11</sup> Sober words indeed.

In his 2010 memoir, *A Journey: My Political Life*, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair shares the following story:

“A friend of mine whose parents were immigrants, Jews from Europe who came to America in search of safety, told me this story. His parents lived and worked in New York. They were not well off. His father died when he was young. His mother lived on, and in time my friend succeeded and became wealthy. He often used to offer his mother the chance to travel outside America. She never did. When eventually she died, they went back to recover the safety box where she kept her jewelry. They found there another box. There was no key. So they had to drill it open. They wondered what precious jewel must be in it. They lifted the lid. There was wrapping and more wrapping and finally an envelope. Intrigued, they opened it. In the envelope were her U.S. citizenship papers. Nothing more. That was the jewel, more precious to her than any other possession. That was what she treasured most.”<sup>12</sup>

It was the beginning of stewardship season at Main Street. Some thought it was about squeezing out a few more dollars from the resistant. They were wrong; it’s about our citizenship in the kingdom and the high value of telling our story. God has imposed some limits on this church, and those limits are your prayers, your time, your faith, your service, and your gifts. So if you are already a tither, raise the percentage this year. If you are not a tither, move in that direction in a planned program. And if you are a church mooch, meaning that you give little or nothing, get with the program! Get over your fear; exercise your faith!

**Phil Thrailkill, Main Street UMC, Greenwood, SC, October 7, 2012**

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<sup>11</sup> Wells, *Inspiring*, 190.

<sup>12</sup> (New York, NY: Knopf, 2010), xvi.

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