

 **Main Street**
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



1 Corinthians 16:1-12
“Growing A Generous Church ”

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(All Saints)

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“Following Christ From City Center!”

I CORINTHIANS 16:1-12
"HOW TO GROW A GENEROUS CHURCH"

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

1 "NOW CONCERNING" (Greek *peri de*) the contribution for the saints": Gal. 2:10, A GOD-GIVEN TASK (1)
as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. Rom. 15:16, LEADERSHIP, CHURCH WIDE (2)
Severe Drought Began In Palestine, 46A.D.
2 On the first day of the week (i.e. Sunday), Acts 20:7, 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, Dt. 15:14, 16:10, 17; 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. Rom. 15:25-26, CONSENSUS (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 I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, Not Sea But Northern Land Route: Via Egnatia, Paul's Plans Were Tentative
for I intend to pass through Macedonia, North Of Greece, KEEP PEOPLE INFORMED (9)
//4:19-20, 11:24, c. April - November
6 and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, Honor, Nov. - Jan., Sea Travel Impossible
so that you may speed me on my journey, wherever I go. Rom. 15:24, Speed = (\$ Help)
7 For I do not want to see you just now in passing; 4:8-21, Acts 20:3
I hope to spend some time with you if the Lord permits. 4:19, Winter 54-55? Divine Qualification
God's Providence/Success
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, p.v., Effective Work (Motivation)
and there are many adversaries. Spiritual Opposition (Expected)
2 Cor. 2:2, Col. 4:3, Riot in Acts 19:21-20:1

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. Agent, 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," 1:10-17, 3:5-17, 4:1-13, 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. His Plans Are His Own!

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.

GROWING A GENEROUS CHURCH

*“...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

There have been several important men in my life, the first being my father, whose middle name I carry, whose mannerisms I unconsciously imitate, and who imprinted me indelibly when it comes to the art of reading the human document and bringing healing arts to bear— his medical, mine theological. Then there was my college professor Dr. Charles Talbert, who set my brain on fire and gave me the tools to map the text. Charles taught me how to read the biblical document, and Dr. Jim the human document. I now read the Bible and diagnose the soul as a general practitioner. One is now dead, the other impaired by a stroke, but hardly a day goes by I do not think of both with gratitude and a deep desire— even at sixty-two— to live in a way to make them proud and to carry on their mission in a new form.

Then there’s an unlikely third, Frank Britting. It was December of ‘79, my first appointment, and I was making the enormous salary of \$12,000 serving four rural churches, as I love to say, “I was so good, they gave me four!” Frank was an agent for Northwestern Mutual. It seems Frank— a faithful Catholic— had developed an interest in helping young Methodist pastors make good decisions, and so he called and made an appointment to drive thirty miles north from Columbia to see us. He was patient, answered every question, and so we bought our first policy for about 50 bucks a month, which was a stretch. Frank became not just an agent but a friend and counselor, and once a year we’d get together to review our plan. So if you hear I’ve died under questionable circumstances, please have Lori investigated. She could move to Italy and start life over with one of *The Three Tenors!*

A father, a professor, and a financial coach each gave a piece of the puzzle. What Paul the Apostle did for this understudy Timothy— which is shape the core competencies of life through coaching— these three did for me, and I’m grateful. I am their disciple. From Frank I learned the value of planning and saving, of giving the

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tithe and beyond. Tithe, save, plan, live as a servant and leave a legacy: the five pillars of life of prosperity and generosity. From Charles I learn to pay close attention to the text till the patterns emerge, and from my dad the commitment to bring the best of resources to bear on the person before you, no matter their race or class. What they gave is now so deeply woven into my life and daily practice it's no longer something I do; it's who I am. I never want to be so busy I cannot close the door and given someone undivided attention. I never want to stop doing my own primary research and start lifting sermons off the Internet. I never want to quit giving to and receiving from the Living and Triune God with whom I am in a covenant that encompasses the whole of life, including my checkbook. These three left a footprint and an imprint. And when you add Lori to the mix, you see how blessed I am. Lots of teachers.

I recently found that Northwestern Mutual sponsors an annual study exploring the state of planning in America.¹ It provides insights into attitudes and behaviors toward money, goal-setting, and priorities. The study surveys more than 1,500 Americans age 25 and older. Here were some of the results from 2013 and 2014:

“More than 6 in 10 say their financial planning needs improvement; and that the number one obstacle is not having enough time. Nearly 7 out of 10 said the pace of life makes it harder to stick with long-term goals. Half of all Americans have no financial plan in place, and only 16 percent are ‘highly disciplined’ planners, meaning they know their goals, have a plan to meet them, and rarely deviate.”

We think of the Apostle Paul as a theologian, letter writer, and traveling missionary. We forget he was also a tradesman, an entrepreneur who made and repaired leather goods, and since Roman soldier had leather tents, there was always work. In addition to being an apostle, one who had seen and been sent out by the risen Jesus, Paul was self-supporting whenever churches were unable to free him for full time ministry. He knew something about money, and what he learned he taught. New believers, especially Gentiles who had not been schooled in the tithe and various offerings of Judaism, needed to be taught the how and why of giving. To follow Jesus is to receive from him in order to give to others. *Freely receive and freely give* is the pattern. Everyone needs to have a stake in in the mission. To use the language of the Northwestern Mutual study, Paul was a *highly disciplined* planner.

¹ www.northwesternmutual.com/about-us/studies/planning-and-progress-2013-study; also 2014.

TURNING TO THE TEXT

We just had a huge flood in the lower half of the state, and churches across South Carolina have been raising relief offerings. That’s exactly what Paul was doing for the mother church in Jerusalem that had gone through a long drought and was in need. As a symbol, it would demonstrate that the Gentile churches who received the news of Jesus from the mother church had now come to her aid. It’s the old *honor your father and mother* principle from the Ten Commandments. We respond to spiritual blessings with financial gifts. Each Sunday is a continuation of that insight which is why we sing as the plates are presented as an offering to God, “Praise God, from whom all blessings flow...” The Word is read and preached; the offering of money and praise is one of our responses. So Paul gives an update, “Now concerning the contribution for the saints.” He wanted everyone to participate. 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.² And the first is to make the need known. Our need for 2016 is little bit greater than last year, so I want you to step up. If you give beyond the tithe– as Lori and I do to set an example– take it up a bit, and if you are not giving a tenth, make a move. Give up something. Postpone something. Be faithful. Honor God. Put the church in your will for at least ten percent so the reading of your testament is a testimony of faith and a witness to your heirs about priorities. We even have a Foundation to help with that kind of plan.

We did not create this grand faith; it was preserved and passed on to us through the church, and giving is a way to honor that relationship. We receive spiritual benefit; we respond financially. Christians give, and it is the responsibility of leaders to make the need known. A chunk of our budget at Main Street– somewhere north of fifteen percent– goes to ministries beyond our local church. Lots of money passes through our hands on the way to other places, and that’s a sign of health.

This appeal in Paul’s case was not for the church budget but for a special offering. That’s always the easiest money to raise because people respond to crisis calls which stir emotions. What’s more difficult is the unglamorous giving: keeping up with all it takes for us to be church week after week. If you want a great church,

² For a biblical review, see Ben Witherington III, *Jesus and Money: A Guide for Times of Financial Crisis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2010), particularly Chapter 9, “Towards a New Testament Theology of Money, Stewardship, and Giving,” 141-152.

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become great givers, and guess what? Jesus said your heart will follow your dollars, “For where your treasure is,” he said, “there will your heart be also.”³

Paul wrote in the second half of verse 1, "...as I directed the churches of Galatia, *so you also are to do.*" No apology in Paul's voice. So without apology, I ask you to catch up if possible and to plan to give for the upcoming year by making a written commitment in two weeks. Don't just give, write it down. It will help us plan. What you give will make a difference in the work we are able to do.

At this point I give a practical aside. A tithe is not just another name for *gift*; a tithe is ten percent. Take your 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 or barter economy. So what is the base for the tithe? When people ask, I reply, “Well, which do you want God to bless, the net or the gross?” We are to give to Caesar what's his through our taxes and faithful citizenship, which— by the way— includes voting. Jesus also said we are to give to God what's God's, which means first ourselves, then our substance as an extension of ourselves. A good guideline for beginners is for your after-tax income should be the base. Start there with ten percent, and if you can't start there, at least move in the right direction. Start at a percent which stretches you and move up a point each quarter. If you start at three percent, in a year you'll be at seven, and by the following fall ten. If you have children, share the decision with them. See how God meets your needs and gives you a new appreciation for simplicity. I have never known a tither who regretted it, and God loves a dare.⁴ Tithing is one of the ways God draws us deeper into his work.

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, cumulative approach, not random, and it includes us all, including small children. Everyone is to have a plan for giving);
- 5) as he may prosper (not all give the same dollar amounts, but all are to aim at a tithe as a faithful minimum);

³ Matthew 6:21.

⁴ Malachi 3:7-12.

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- 6) so that contributions need not be made when I come” (that means no last-minute rush; no pressurized giving).

It is possible, I suppose, to give money without giving yourself, but at its best giving is self-offering. Paul counsels them to do it "on the first day of week," on Sunday- the day of resurrection, the day Christians worship. Not *on pay day*, but on "the first day of the week" as worship. The poor are to give and learn to receive from God; the rich are to give and not think it buys influence. When I see big houses and fancy cars, I wonder, “Are they tithing, or only tipping?”

And don't kid yourself by the amount. Look at the percentage; it's a much truer indicator. "I am a three percent giver, or a five *percent*er." It's the equivalent of your blood pressure or cholesterol, a vital sign. Of course amounts differ. In the Corinthian church were prosperous merchants and influential city officials, also tradesman and at the bottom slaves with little, but the standard was the same for all: giving is to be planned and proportionate, an act of self-surrender in weekly worship.

The sixth principle is that the church hold the preacher accountable for teaching but not for the administration of 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. I do not sign any checks in this church.

The seventh and eighth are about integrity and unity. Paul would not carry the money to Jerusalem. He took care to ensure internal controls: 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, bur books honest, our audits regular. We issue quarterly statements to keep you informed. Our budget is available. The only thing you can't know is who gives what. If you have questions, ask. All churches receive and account for designated gifts. But in a church where trust is high, there are few designated gifts because members care about the health of the church *as a whole*, not just their pet project.

The ninth and tenth— and here the focus shifts from money to people—are found in verses 5 through 12. Here we learn Paul's plans, as well as those of his associate Timothy and colleague Apollos. Paul has a clear vision of what he wants to accomplish, "...for I intend to pass through Macedonia." He's also flexible and open to the unexpected, so he writes "and *perhaps* I will stay with you.... I *hope* to spend some time with you *if the Lord permits*." He has plans, but underneath is the

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realization everything is "perhaps" and "if the Lord permits." Goal setting is important, but the risen Lord may block our plans and direct us to another open door. Principle nine is that if you expect people to give, keep them informed.

I am here because the church ordained me to be in ministry in Christ's name at all times and in places. I agree with Paul when he says that "an effective work has opened to me, *and there are many adversaries.*" They always go together, opportunity and problems, a chance to obey Christ and the resistance of the Evil One.

Principle number ten is easily missed. In the midst of a presentation on a relief offering, Paul mentions junior and senior co-workers, Timothy and Apollos. Being a steward is not only about money; it's about people. Mission means fund-raising; it's also 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." As a younger man, Timothy needed cover, but not Apollos, of whom Paul said, "He will come when he has opportunity." So the question is not only, *What* are you giving? but, *Who* are you developing?⁵

CONCLUSION

Don't be a tipper; be a tither. Can I promise you riches with some *seed-faith, health-and-wealth* formula? No; what I promise is that the ninety percent will go further with God's blessing that without it, and you will have put in place the single most important principle of life management which is to honor God off the top, then use the rest with God's wisdom. 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! It was John Wesley who summed up the biblical ethic of stewardship in three phrases, "*Earn* all you can. *Save* all you can. *Give* all you can."⁶ Many work hard, save and invest in hopes of financial freedom. But the third is the test: to *give all you can.*" That is a different kind of freedom, and we give you a fresh chance every Sunday. Remember the promise you made? "As members of Main Street UMC, will you faithfully participate in our ministries by your prayers, your presence, *your gifts (spiritual and financial)*, your service, and your witness?" **I will.** How are you doing with your promise?

⁵ See Randy Reese and Robert Loane, *Deep Mentoring: Guiding Others on Their Leadership Journey* (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 2012).

⁶ Albert Wells, *Inspiring Quotations* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1988), 190.
