

IN YOUR GIVING & LIVING**1 CORINTHIANS 16**

Today we conclude this series of message on the NT book of 1 Corinthians. Back in September when I began this series, I mentioned there are two ways you can magnify an object: microscope magnifying and telescope magnifying. When you use a microscope to magnify something, you make something small look bigger than it is. But, when you use a telescope, you make something that's already big begin to look even bigger. When it comes to God and our relationship with Him, we're called to be telescopes, not microscopes. We're not called to make a small God look bigger than He is. We're not microscopes. Instead, we're called to make a great, big God begin to look as big as He truly is. We're telescopes. There is nothing and nobody bigger or more important than God. And so the calling of those of us who love God and follow Jesus is to make His greatness begin to look as big and wonderful as it really is. That's why we exist and why we've been restored to a relationship with God. That's the calling of every follower of Jesus! We're called to magnify God or to glorify Him.

I've called this series of messages "In Whatever You Do: Discovering What It Means To Glorify God." That's the most important concept or truth in all of 1 Corinthians. It's stated explicitly in 10:31 (NLT), "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." In whatever we do – anything and everything - we have the opportunity to honor and glorify God: every situation, every circumstance, every relationship, and every task. When people interact with us, we should resemble a living, breathing telescope through which they can see and appreciate God's glory. When I read chapter 16 – the last chapter of Paul's letter to the Corinthian Christians – I hear him saying God has given us the ability to glorify Him in our financial giving and also in our everyday lives. Let me read the chapter for us just now. So, let's see how Paul answered this question.

HOW CAN I GLORIFY GOD IN MY FINANCIAL GIVING?

Paul had assumed a leadership role in raising a significant financial gift from many of the churches he had established in his evangelistic ministry throughout what are now the countries of Greece and Turkey. The recipient of this special offering was the church in Jerusalem – the very first organized Christian community anywhere – the "mother" church of all the other churches established in the first century. Apparently, many of the Christians in the Jerusalem church were poverty stricken for one reason or another. In the book of Acts, we're told a large number of widows receiving financial support through the Jerusalem church. We're also told the people in the region in and around Jerusalem endured a famine. So, one reason for the offering was simply because Paul knew there was a great need among Christians in Jerusalem and he wanted fellow believers to help meet that need in a practical, sacrificial way.

But Paul had an additional reason for promoting and collecting this offering. Most of the Christians at the Jerusalem church were Jewish. Most of the Christians at the church in

Corinth – and the other churches Paul founded – were Gentiles or non-Jews. He wanted to bring together these two different ethnic groups which had already shown signs of an uneasy, far less than perfect partnership. Paul explained this motivation in terms of reciprocity. “For you see, the believers in Macedonia and Achaia have eagerly taken up an offering for the poor among the believers in Jerusalem. They were glad to do this because they feel they owe a real debt to them. Since the Gentiles received the spiritual blessings of the Good News from the believers in Jerusalem, they feel the least they can do in return is to help them financially.” (Rom. 15:26-27 NLT)

Paul mentioned this special offering in several of his NT letters. Even though it was a special, one-time offering, the teaching he gave here is consistent with what’s found in Scripture for any and all financial giving to help build God’s Kingdom. In other words, it applies to our regular giving to the church weekly or monthly, our response to special offerings, and our support for missionaries or organizations beyond our church that advance the Gospel in some way. The key verse is 16:2 (NIV), “On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.”

When you want to glorify God in your financial giving, be prepared. Notice the words and phrases in that verse that assume preparation: “On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.” (16:2) By referring to the first day of the week, Paul was likely pointing to the day when Christians gathered for their worship service: Sunday rather than Saturday which was the Jewish Sabbath. When you set money aside or save it up so you can bring it in and give it on a specific day, preparation is clearly implied. You’ve thought about it, prayed about it, and made a decision of how much to give in advance. Some Christians resist this idea. They prefer spontaneity in their giving or when the Holy Spirit moves them to give. They point to something Jesus said, “But when you give to someone in need, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Give your gifts in private, and your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.” (Mt. 6:3-4 NLT) Jesus was not advocating unplanned, unprepared giving there. Instead, Jesus’ point was to give money quietly and privately so only God could see it instead of giving money publicly so everyone could be duly impressed by your generosity. Throughout Scripture the clear emphasis is on the superiority of planned giving. Prepared giving is systematically planned in advance rather than being haphazard or irregular.

Notice also how Paul’s appeal here is rather matter of fact. There’s no pressure, no gimmicks, no manipulation of emotions. Quite simply, a need in the Jerusalem church had to be met and the Corinthians were encouraged to be part of the answer. Prepared giving is less susceptible to emotional appeals. I believe Paul took that approach because he also knew prepared giving results in greater gifts. I’m not saying we should never give money spontaneously to meet some need. I am saying prepared giving, most of the time, will result in a greater, total gift than spontaneous giving. Paul wasn’t

interested in trying to raise a sacrificial gift in one great appeal. His plan likely ensured a greater gift than a single collection at the time of his arrival in Corinth.

When you want to glorify God in your financial giving, be proportionate. “On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.” (16:2) In other words, the more you have been given, the more you should give. Paul doesn’t mention tithing here, but the tithe is the best example of proportionate giving. If you make \$100 a week, you give \$10 to the Lord. If you make \$10,000 a week, you give \$1,000 to the Lord. That’s proportionate giving. It’s one way to embrace generosity and its blessings. In addition, if God has blest you abundantly in a financial way, you should consider giving above and beyond the tithe to the Lord’s work. Don’t ever be afraid to give to the Lord generously. Like a wise farmer, the more seed you plant, the more you will harvest. Proverbs 11:24 (NLT) underlines the truth of that principle. “Give freely and become more wealthy; be stingy and lose everything.”

Pastor and author, John Maxwell, tells the story of what happened when his then 14-year-old son got his first job. Shortly thereafter, he got his first, official paycheck. Boy, was he thrilled. He came home and showed his dad his paycheck. Then he marched into the room where his mom was and said, "You know, I've thought it over and I'm not sure I can afford to tithe." He had more money in his hand than he'd ever had before, and what happened? The same thing that can happen to you and me. All of a sudden we say, "I really need this money for something else." Out of the mouth of a 14-year-old boy, true to his human nature, comes this whole question, "Where do I put God?" Is he first? Is he fifth? Is he twenty-third in my life? Where do you put God?

When you want to glorify the Lord in your financial giving, be faithful. “On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.” (16:2) Who was supposed to give their money? Each one of you. Don’t ever excuse yourself from financial giving to the Lord. “I’m too poor to give.... I have to pay off my debts first.... We’re in the middle of a pandemic.... My little amount won’t make a difference anyway.... God doesn’t need my money.... I just want to keep my relationship with God about spiritual stuff.” There are never good reasons not to give, just bad excuses. Every follower of Jesus should be a giver, because God Himself is the supreme giver. “For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son.” (Jo 3:16 NLT)

One Sunday a group of visiting American Chinese Christians visited various churches near the Chinese city of Nanking. One congregation was a poor, rural church composed of farmers. The 900 who were present for the service wanted to hear a word from their Christian sister – a Mrs. Chang - from the U.S. So Mrs. Chang brought greetings from her church in Los Angeles. She told how the Lord had added many to their church and how they were currently building a large new addition. Then after a word of blessing for this church, she took her seat. At the close of the worship time, Mrs. Chang was called back to the front. The pastor said her words had thrilled their

hearts. They wanted her to have the entire morning offering to help with the new building in Los Angeles — about \$140. When their overflowing joy welled up in generosity, they gave beyond their ability. Don't ever excuse yourself from giving. You will miss the opportunity to be blessed and to be a blessing. When it comes to our financial giving, preparation, proportion, and faithfulness glorify the Lord. I see Paul answering another important question in this final chapter of 1 Corinthians.

HOW CAN I GLORIFY GOD IN MY EVERYDAY LIVING?

Look at what Paul wrote there in 16:9 (NLT) “There is a wide-open door for a great work here, although many oppose me.” Again, Paul was living and ministering in the city of Ephesus when he wrote this letter to the Christians in Corinth. I'm struck by the fact that if you and I are all about glorifying God in our everyday living, we will anticipate God-given opportunities to serve Him. Life is full of them! Paul didn't tell the Corinthians what they were exactly, but through prayer, spiritual discernment, and the Holy Spirit's nudges, he was excited about what God could do through his efforts. There's a mindset there that we need to apply to our own lives, isn't there? God has a work for you and me to do in this world. In fact God wants us to be involved in building His Kingdom much more than we want to be. If we truly want to know what those opportunities are, God will show us what to do for Him at the right time. We can live everyday with an expectancy – a holy anticipation – that the Holy Spirit will direct and lead us into specific ways to serve the Lord right now today and everyday.

At the same time, you and I should also anticipate opposition to the ministry opportunities God provides. Look again at 16:9 (NLT) “There is a wide-open door for a great work here, although many oppose me.” If you read Acts 19, you'll get some idea of the opposition Paul faced. Paul began his evangelistic ministry in Ephesus by first going to the Jewish synagogue and speaking boldly there about Jesus for three months. Eventually, he was expelled from the synagogue by some of the leading Jews who refused to believe in Jesus. Paul had to find a new venue from which to preach and teach about Jesus. There was plenty of demonic activity that Paul had to address. Ephesus was also the center of the worship of the Greek goddess, Artemis. Because so many people were becoming Christians in Ephesus, the artisans who made idols of Artemis for people to buy began to feel their business was threatened. That touched off a city-wide riot in Ephesus and Paul's life was threatened.

Right here is an important principle for each of us. I must assume the presence of opposition when I'm doing God's will, not its absence. I don't know about you, but I'm prone to think just the opposite. It's easy to assume the moment I get push back in doing some kind of ministry for Jesus or serving Him in some way – some kind of adversity, some kind of hurdle, some kind of obstacle – that it must not be God's will after all. I'm tempted to quit, give up, and avoid opposition. Ironically, Paul didn't see opposition as a deterrent to doing ministry at all. He expected it and took it in stride. In fact, verse 9 pretty much described Paul's life and work as God's servant. There were

always great open doors for ministry. There was also great opposition, too. In other words, divine opportunities to serve Jesus often include opposition God permits.

Of course, we should care about physical safety, but sometimes we can go overboard. For example, a Canadian newspaper had a report on "safety-minded bureaucrats" who are putting an end to an apparently "dangerous" activity—pickup games on homemade hockey rinks. In Ontario a family faced a possible fine of \$25,000 for putting a homemade rink in their front yard. A community near Calgary tried to create (and fully insure) a local pond hockey league, but the town council intervened, citing "liability" issues. Then in north Edmonton, a mother of three was shoveling the pond behind her home when the local authorities slapped her with a \$100 fine. Her crime? Modifying the "land in a way likely to cause injury." We can bring that same kind of risk adverse attitude into living all out for Jesus. But at what cost? Are we trying to make our lives so safe and so risk-free that we limit our ability to follow Christ?

I hear that approach to everyday life and living in something else Paul wrote here. 16:13 (NLT) says, "Be on guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong." In other words, I must realize I have spiritual enemies and be willing to fight. You see, all four of those commands have a kind of military connotation to them. They could easily have been said by an officer to soldiers under his command. "Be on guard." In other words, you have enemies out there. Don't be surprised by them. "Stand firm in your faith." In other words, when you're fighting stay together; close ranks; keep close together. "Be courageous." Don't flinch, soldier. Maintain your position. Press forward. "Be strong." Don't give in to fear. Summon up your courage. Paul assumed the presence of spiritual opposition far more than we do or might. Here's something you and I need to think about and be prepared for. If we're going to glorify the Lord in our everyday lives, prepare to face some stiff opposition along the way. Opposition from non-believers, opposition from even fellow believers, and opposition from within yourself. We can't let that discourage us or make us stop. Expect it. Come on, follower of Jesus, be on guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong.

Here's a final word. Act in love always as the ultimate goal. If you truly want to glorify God in your everyday life, that's the target to keep shooting at every day. It's stated right there in 16:14 (NLT), "And do everything with love." There was a whole lot to be impressed about in the Corinthian church. Spiritual gifts abounded. Their worship services were amazing. But they lacked the most important ingredient in being a truly great church. They lacked love for one another. That's why Paul wrote what we now call 1 Corinthians 13 – the great love chapter. That's why he had to remind them here in this chapter to treat his younger friend and partner in ministry, Timothy, with respect and kindness. "When Timothy comes, don't intimidate him. He is doing the Lord's work, just as I am. Don't let anyone treat him with contempt. Send him on his way with your blessing when he returns to me." (16:10-11 NLT) That's also why Paul commended three men the church in Corinth sent to him in Ephesus – Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus. "They have been providing the help you weren't here to give me. They have been a wonderful encouragement to me, as they have been to you.

You must show your appreciation to all who serve so well.” (16:17-18 NLT) Those men made serving Paul in love their ultimate aim. They encouraged him. And when we love others and serve them in Jesus’ name, we encourage them and we glorify God in our everyday lives. We magnify God like a telescope magnifies the stars in the night sky. We make an unfathomably big God even bigger!

Do you know where the most remote Costco store is located? Juneau, Alaska. That store is an absolute lifeline for an even more remote community in Alaska – a town called Gustavus – population 446. Gustavus is remote in a way that only Alaskans can truly grasp. Even today, no roads connect it to the outside world. But when the town’s usual transport methods were disrupted by the global pandemic, its residents found themselves with diminished access to affordable food. That’s when one man—the town grocer—decided to take matters into his own hands. His name is Toshua Parker. His weathered wooden grocery store is a lifeline for the community. It’s called Ice Strait Wholesale, but locals have dubbed it Toshco—a combination of the owner’s name and the chain from which he sources most of his goods.

During COVID-19, that store – Toscho – has become crucially important. Because the supply chains were so limited, quarantined residents were left without an option for affordable groceries. So, Toshua Parker loaded a few shipping crates onto his 96-foot barge and began making weekly 7-hour trips to the Costco in Alaska’s state capital, Juneau. A few intrepid men load its deck with \$20k worth of eggs, flour, meat, canned goods, and produce and they head back to Gustavus right away. Gustavus’s mayor has to tip his hat, “Toshua pretty much saved the town. I really don’t know what we would’ve done without him.” When the barge pulls into Gustavus, it’s cause for celebration. Toshua says, “It’s like Christmas when the load gets here. Everyone is waiting for it. Word gets out, and they all seem to know when it’s coming.”

I’m challenged by Toshua Parker. Rather than throwing up his hands when the pandemic hit and just giving up in despair, he’s shown how one person can make a difference in their community by using their God-given creativity and resources. We can all look to God for ways to shine in our neighborhood during this time of crisis. That’s what it means to make love our aim. That’s what it means to glorify God. “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” (10:31 NLT)