

Well, today we've come to the final chapter of 1 Corinthians. And it's not often we hear chapter 16 getting taught. It sometimes gets overlooked because we assume it's Paul's personal remarks, and it's not that relevant for us – Paul's just wrapping up his letter, and saying “Ta Taa. See you later,” “Love Paul”...

But the thing is, when the Apostle Paul wrote a letter, he wasn't in the habit of wasting words. **And** we have to remember, that the Bible wasn't written with chapter and verse numbers in it. They were added (later on), to help us to find our way around the Bible... Paul just wrote a letter, and we're not in the habit of putting chapter and verse numbers in a letter, are we? We finish one paragraph, and start the next one. And that's what Paul did.

At the end of chapter **15**, he's been sharing how the promise and our expectation of eternal life, compels us, to be **steadfast, immovable**, and to be **always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord [our] labour is not in vain...** And from making that statement, he then goes straight into the next paragraph, which is a very practical example of **how** we can be steadfast, of **how** we can be immovable, and **how** we can abound in the work of the Lord.

1.

And the **first** practical example he gives us (of doing the Lord's work) is “generosity”.

The Christians in Jerusalem were doing it tough. Jerusalem wasn't (at all) a wealthy city. But on top of that, the

Christians, were on the 'outer'. The Jews hated them, and the Jews dominated the economy of Jerusalem, and so the Christians in Jerusalem, well they missed out on opportunities of employment; they missed out on business opportunities – They were generally pretty poor...

But the church in Corinth, weren't doing it as tough as what they were. Being a major seaport and a major trading hub, Corinth (itself) was quite prosperous. Now, of course we know that wealth doesn't always trickle down to **everybody** in the community, but compared to the Christians in Jerusalem, they were doing OK.

And what should we do about it? When we know that Christians in another town, or another country are suffering, what should we do about it? Well, we should help them (however we can), because in the family of God, they're our brothers and sisters. And of course the most practical way we can help them, is to send them some money for food.

And Paul gives 3 very practical instructions on how to do this.

Firstly, [giving should be planned](#).

I learned a long time ago, that if giving to support local ministry wasn't my first priority, and giving to help those in need, wasn't my second priority, I'd ultimately spend everything I earned on 'other important stuff', and I'd have nothing left to give... Here's the thing: If we leave God the leftovers, guess what? Often, there won't be any leftovers...

Our giving, should be planned. *Right from the very first day I first started work, I made a cash-flow budget. Income up the*

top (how much income I expected to earn each month), And then all of the itemised expected expenses for each month of the year. And a line item of our budget, was “tithe”. 10% of our gross income (before expenses and before tax), to give to the church.

Another line, was for supporting overseas Christian aid...

Giving, should be planned. And I’m not saying **you** have to do this, but it’s certainly been very helpful for us, in making “giving” a priority.

Paul says to put something aside each week. And I want to encourage you: “Plan, to give generously”.

Secondly, **Everybody has the capacity to give.**

- It doesn’t matter how rich I am, or how poor I feel I am;
- It doesn’t matter whether I’m a wage earner, or whether I’m a business owner;
- It doesn’t matter whether I’m on a regular income, or whether it’s seasonal;
- It doesn’t matter whether I’m paying off a house; or paying off a farm....

Everybody has the capacity to give something.

Paul says “**each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper**”

We all have the capacity to give... And if I’m not giving, I need to rearrange my finances (or my living arrangements), so I can.

And thirdly, when we give, we should **entrust our gift , to people we trust**, to make sure it gets to the right place.

Paul was going to make sure that the gift made it to those who were in need. And when **we** give, it's pretty important that **we** don't just send our money off to every internet scam that comes along... Even locally, **I've** got to be very careful, not to just give to somebody who's got no food because they've spent all their dole cheque on drugs or alcohol...

When we give, a good practice, is to give through reputable, Christian organisations.

Alright, so the first practical example of doing the Lord's work, is "generosity".

2.

The second example, is "hospitality".

Paul is a missionary.... Now, we're not all missionaries like Paul. But we **can** all be **involved** in mission, and the Corinthians could do this, simply by being hospitable – Paul's going to need somewhere to stay overwinter. And likewise, Timothy's going to need some hospitality as **he** passes through.

And Christian hospitality:

- is an opportunity for fellowship
- it's an opportunity for us to express our generosity; and

- it's an opportunity to partner with those who are called to mission

I am so thankful that my parents gave us kids a good example of hospitality... Even people we didn't know – if they were doing the Lord's work, and they came to town and had nowhere to stay, guess where they stayed: Our place. Even once a year, when the Salvation army man came around – in a lot of towns, he'd just sleep in his car, but when he was in our district, he stayed with us.

And I am so thankful, for the example my parents set for us..

Seldom, do we realise, just how important Christian hospitality is...

I reckon, from my experience, the single biggest door, that any of us can open, that makes a local church to be a more inviting place, is Christian hospitality. The greatest thing that any of us can do, is when a visitor comes to church, is to invite them home for lunch. They might be strangers, but they're not really strangers – they're brothers and sisters in Christ.

Be hospitable. Wouldn't it be wonderful, if every visitor that we had to this church, was invited home to somebody's place for lunch...

3.

The third example of doing the Lord's work and being steadfast and immovable in our faith, is persistence.

Sometimes we just give up **way too quick.**

Paul tells us that he's going to **stay** in Ephesus until Pentecost, because there's a wide door open, for effective work... But he also says "**and** there are many adversaries"... He's staying for 2 reasons – He sees a big opportunity for the Lord's work, **and** there's people there, who are trying to destroy him...

One thing that I have noticed in ministry, is that when the Lord opens a door for effective work, the devil does his darndest, to try and slam it in our face. When the Gospel is being preached, and people are turning their hearts toward God, and growing in the faith, we can be sure, that adversaries will rise against that ministry...

How do we take that???

....

As a pastor, I've had some pretty deep conversations... And from my experience, one of the most common cravings I've found in disciples of Jesus, is to know the will of God...

And when it comes to discerning the will of God, a lot of folk use what they call, the "Open door / Closed door" principal... Are you familiar with that???

They pray:

- Lord, how do you want me to serve you; or
- God, what ministry do you want this church involved in; or
- whatever – just insert your prayer here,

And then they look to see what doors open, and what doors close, and there you go – they feel they've got the answer to their prayer.... And there's some validity in that...

But you know what??? I reckon, with the “Open door / Closed door” principal, **most** of the time, we’re actually looking for the **wrong** sort of door. We’re looking for the door of “**easiness**”, or for the door of “**convenience**”,,,, when we **should** be looking for the door of “opportunity” or the door of “effectiveness”... Sometimes the **most** effective ministries are those that are harshly persecuted.

And for so many of us, when things get tough, we go, “Oh, God’s closed that door – we’ll move on to something else.”....

Paul knew better... Paul knew that obedience to Christ, is always going to be costly, and rarely will it be popular, and almost never, will it be easy... In fact, Paul saw “increasing adversity”, as a sign that he should persevere...

4.

Fourthly, persevering in the work of the Lord, includes visitation...

Timothy is going to come and visit them. Apollos is going to (when he gets an opportunity). Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, are 3 men, who’s names we are reading 2000 years after this letter was written, for one simple reason: Paul wanted to honour them, because they came to visit Paul when he needed it...

Some people feel “It’s the minister’s job to visit”... Yes, it is, because we should **all** be visiting... Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, refreshed Paul’s spirit, by visiting him (do you realise, your Pastor needs to be visited too???)....

And we can **all** visit. All it takes, is time... Is there anyone at all, in Warrawee whom you know??? Well, I reckon I could pretty much guarantee, that they'd enjoy a visit every now and then...

What about your brothers and sisters in Christ? There are few things more delightful, than just having someone 'drop in', to spend some time, "just because"....

What about those who are not yet Christians??? A visit from you, and an invitation to not only come to church, but for you to pick them up and bring them to church... Just dropping in, out of the blue... *You know, I learned a long time ago, no matter how busy I am, if someone invites me for a cup-a-tea, "Yeah, that'd be great." Because over a cup-a-tea, ya talk...*

Do you know what happens when we visit someone in the name of Christ??? It refreshes their spirit. God does something supernatural, when we visit in the name of Christ... And we can all do that...

And now, Paul gives 5 final instructions:

5.
Be watchful. That's like saying – **Stay Awake.**

The time of Jesus' return, is fast approaching... Let's be ready when He comes.

6.

Stand firm in the faith.

We talked about that last week – always hold fast to our faith in Jesus Christ. Don't be swayed from it.

7. Act like men.

I thank God, that this **isn't** the case for this church here at "Bush Disciples", but in the majority of western churches today, the men are mostly absent... And why wouldn't they be? For years now, some churches have been trying to suppress (and demonise) the masculinity of men...

And guess what: God doesn't want men to be effeminate. Nor, does He want us to be scared or timid like little children...

You know, some bible translations have even tried to remove the perceived "gender bias" of this verse. Instead of saying, "Act like men", they say "be courageous"... But the Greek word, is ἀνδρίζεσθε, (andrizesthe), which is entirely about masculinity – **Man up**...

And yeah, to be a man, **is** to be a man of courage – and it is to be a **leader**... But why aren't the men stepping up in our churches?

- Why are the men letting the women take the load?
- Why **aren't** the men, knuckling down, and studying in the word, so they can be the teachers????

Is it because we have a false idea of what it means to be a man?... Our culture teaches us that to be a man, is to play

football and drink beer... Whereas Paul's idea of being a man, is to be mature in the faith – to be a leader; to be courageous; and to be a teacher...

Man up. Be courageous. Be mature in the faith...

8.

Be strong.

We're only strong because God is strong... This comes down to faith, doesn't it???

9.

But you know what??? "Manning up" and "being strong" – we don't do it in the way the world does it...

V14 says, "¹⁴ Let all that you do be done in love."

Worldly manliness and worldly strength, is all about being overbearing, and oppressing those who are weak... And sadly, sometimes men get it into their heads that masculinity and being the head of the house, makes **them** the master, and their wife the slave.... In the **worst** of cases, domestic violence and abuse, is perpetrated in the name of "being the man"...

We won't have any of that here, and Paul won't have any of it either.. He says: ¹⁴ Let all that you do be done in love.

Whether you're a man or a woman; a boy or a girl, let all that you do, be done in love... And let it be done for the building up of the other...

Righto...

Now we reach the final part, where Paul signs off...

Various churches and various people send greetings...

Isn't that nice... I reckon we should do more of that – Foster a greater connectedness with churches in other towns... And I'm feeling a little bit ashamed right now. We visited the Bongeen Church of Christ last week, and I neglected to share with them Greetings in the name of the Lord, from Bush Disciples... oops...

Wouldn't it be nice, if every time, one of us were away, and visited another church, we could share with that church, a greeting in the name of Christ, from this little church of Bush Disciples....

I remember a man from our church in Dalby, who every time he went away, he got up and shared greetings from our church to them, and every time he returned, he got up and shared a greeting from their church to ours... I never thought much about it at the time, but isn't that wonderful?

The Christian church is much bigger than ourselves... Our connectedness with other churches (in other places), is so important. We should never become 'insular', and be only fixated on ourselves...

Moving on: “²⁰ All the brothers send you greetings.
Greet one another with a holy kiss.”

By the way, do you know the difference between a holy kiss
and an unholy kiss??? About 15 seconds.

Righto, we come to the end.

When Paul wrote a letter, usually most of it was written by a
Scribe – he’d dictate it, and somebody else would write it, but
usually he like to finish it off with his own handwriting – to
give it that personal touch...

And it might surprise us, that as Paul finished off this letter, he
gave both a blessing, **and** a curse
...

Now, as good Christians, we’re (pretty much) used to
blessings... But here, Paul actually feels that it’s so
important, that as he writes in his own scrawl, he also pens a
curse...

²² If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be
accursed. Our Lord, come!

Remember, this church in Corinth, that he's been writing to, has been a church filled with bitterness and bickering; Some thought of themselves, more than they thought of others; Some prided themselves on their knowledge, but they didn't know at all...

It was pretty obvious to Paul, that there were some there in that church, who didn't love the Lord... It was John who told us, "If you don't love your brother, than you can't claim to love the Lord.¹³"

And if we don't have a brotherly affection towards our Lord Jesus Christ, we have no place being in the church – we should be accursed...

When the Lord returns, He's going to sort out the wheat from the chaff; He'll sort out the sheep from the goats; He'll sort out those who love him from those who **don't** love Him...

And those who **don't** love the Lord, will be accursed...

But for those who **do** love the Lord – for those who **do** belong to Christ, he has a most wonderful blessing, and I'm going to finish today with that blessing: Our Lord, come! ²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. ²⁴ **My** love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

ⁱ 1 John 4:20-21 (ESV)

²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. ²¹ And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.