LESSON NINETEEN

Built Different

"A Disciple Is Generous, Courageous, and Loving"

SCRIPTURE | 1 Corinthians 16:1–24

MEMORY VERSE

"I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought" (1 Corinthians 1:10).

MAIN IDEA OF THE TEXT

Built different: disciples live with sacrificial generosity.

DISCIPLESHIP RHYTHM

Discipleship Rhythm: Sacrificial Generosity

GROUP TIME

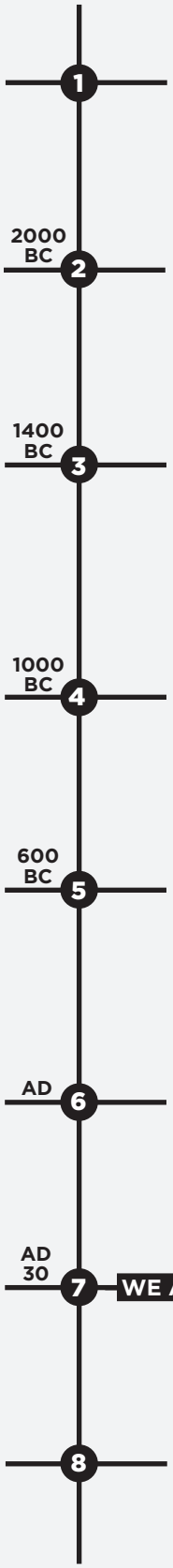
5 minutes	**Welcome**
5–10 minutes	**Attention Grabber**
10 minutes	**Story / Context**
25 minutes	**Discussion**
5–10 minutes	**Closing & Prayer**

PRAYER FOCUS

- **Christmas Services** – Pray for the services to run smoothly, for the many volunteers who will serve sacrificially to bless others, and for an environment where the name of Jesus is glorified. Pray that the many families and One Mores being invited would attend and encounter the love of God demonstrated through Jesus Christ.

<u>BEGIN</u> this time in prayer, confessing any sins you know of, thanking the Lord for the gift of his Word, and asking the Holy Spirit to guide your study.

GOD'S STORY TIMELINE



1. God Creates the World and Promises a Rescuer *(Genesis 1-11)*
God created everything good and placed humans in a garden to live in close relationship with Him. But Adam and Eve chose to trust themselves instead of God, and sin entered the world. Relationships, creation, even our connection to God was broken. Yet even in judgment, God promised that one day, a descendant of Eve would crush the serpent and bring healing.
+This points to Jesus as the promised Rescuer who defeats sin, Satan, and death.

2. God Calls a Family and Makes a Promise *(Genesis 12-50)*
God chose a man named Abram (later Abraham) and gave a covenant to him: that he would have a large family, receive a land, and be a blessing to all nations. Though Abraham and his descendants were deeply flawed, God continued His promise through Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.
+This points to Jesus as the true offspring of Abraham, through whom all nations are fully blessed.

3. God Rescues His People and Forms a Redeemed Nation *(Exodus-Deuteronomy)*
Generations later, Abraham's descendants were enslaved in Egypt. God raised up Moses to rescue them from oppression and slavery. God called His people into a relationship with Himself. He made a covenant with them, gave them the law, and instructed them in worship. He was forming a people who would live differently and show the world what it looked like to belong to Him.
+This points to Jesus as the greater Moses, who rescues us from slavery to sin and writes God's law on our hearts.

4. God Gives a Home and Promises a King *(Joshua-2 Chronicles)*
God brought His people into the promised land under Joshua's leadership. Over time, they asked for a king like the other nations. It was a disaster. But God graciously gave them David, with whom he made another covenant: one of David's descendants would rule forever. Solomon built the temple, but after his death, the kingdom split into two and began spiraling into idolatry and injustice again.
+This points to Jesus as the forever King from David's line, who reigns with justice and peace.

5. God Removes His People and Reminds Them of His Promise *(Ezra-Nehemiah)*
Because of their rebellion, God allowed His people to be conquered and taken into exile. First, it was the Northern Kingdom, Israel (to Assyria), then the Southern Kingdom, Judah (to Babylon). The temple was destroyed, and the glory of the kingdom faded. Yet God continued to speak through the prophets, reminding the people of His promise to restore them, give them new hearts, and send a Rescuer.
+This points to Jesus as the one who brings the new covenant, restores hearts, and fulfills every prophecy.

6. God Sends His Son and Fulfills His Promise *(Matthew-John)*
At just the right time, God sent Jesus into the world—born of a virgin, fully God and fully man. He perfectly obeyed the law, pointed us to the Father, and laid down His life as a sacrifice for our sins. On the third day, He rose again, proving that He is the Savior, the King, and the fulfillment of every covenant promise God has ever made.
+Jesus is the center of the story—all of Scripture leads to Him.

7. God Sends His Spirit and Builds His Church *(Acts-Jude)*
After rising from the dead, Jesus ascended into heaven and sent the Holy Spirit to empower His followers. The early Church spread the good news of Jesus across the Roman world—planting churches, welcoming both Jews and Gentiles, and learning to live as God's new covenant people. Though imperfect, the Church carries Jesus' mission forward today.
+This points to Jesus as the risen King who gives the Spirit to dwell in us and send us on mission.

8. God Restores All Things and Dwells with His People *(Revelation)*
The story isn't over. One day Jesus will return to judge evil and make all things new. There will be a new heaven and new earth, where God's people from every tribe and nation will live with Him forever. There will be no more pain, no more death, and no more sin—just joy, justice, and unbroken peace.
+This points to Jesus as the one who brings the story to its perfect and eternal culmination.

1 GRAB THEIR ATTENTION

LEADER TIP

To grab your participants' attention, start your lesson by telling a story related to the lesson's main idea. We have provided you with three options in this section, but feel free to develop your own.

OPTION 1: OSEOLA MCCARTY

For most of her life, Oseola McCarty made her living washing and ironing clothes in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. She left school in the sixth grade, worked for decades, lived simply, and consistently saved what she could. In 1995, at eighty-seven years old, she gave $150,000, the majority of her life savings, to the University of Southern Mississippi to fund scholarships for students who might not otherwise be able to afford college.

What's amazing about her story is how her giving was built through thousands of small decisions over an entire lifetime. She did not have an enormous income, but she intentionally used what she had for the good of someone else. Her story reminds us that generosity is not reserved for people with more money. It begins with deciding what we will do with what God has already placed in our hands.

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- *Have you ever intentionally chosen to set aside something small and seen it grow into something large? It doesn't have to be money. Tell us about it.*
- *Why do we sometimes assume generosity is easier for people who have more money?*
- *What difference does it make when generosity becomes something we plan for rather than something we do only when we have extra?*

Transition Statement from Attention Grabber to Text:
Oseola McCarty's story shows how consistent choices with ordinary resources can become extraordinary generosity. In 1 Corinthians 16:1–24, Paul told the Corinthians to regularly set aside part of what God had provided so they would be ready to give. Disciples are built different because disciples intentionally choose sacrificial generosity.

OPTION 2: BOAZ LEFT THE EDGES (RUTH 2)

God commanded Israelite farmers not to harvest every inch of their fields or pick up every stalk that fell. They were to leave part of the harvest for the poor and the foreigner (Leviticus 19:9–10; Deuteronomy 24:19–22). Generosity was built into the harvest from the beginning. A faithful farmer did not gather everything for himself and then ask whether he had anything left to share. He intentionally left margin for someone else.

We see this lived out in Ruth 2. Ruth went into the fields to glean behind the harvesters (Ruth 2:2–3), and Boaz did more than simply allow her to gather what the law required. He protected her, provided for her, and then told his workers to deliberately pull stalks from their bundles and leave them for her to pick up (Ruth 2:8–9, 14–16). Boaz used what God had given him to create room for someone else to flourish. His generosity was not accidental surplus. It was intentional.

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- *Have you ever intentionally chosen to save something for someone else? Tell us about it.*
- *What is the difference between giving from leftovers and deliberately leaving margin to give?*

Transition Statement from Attention Grabber to Text:
Boaz did not wait until the harvest was over to see whether anything was left for someone else. Generosity was an intentional choice, and he built it into the way he used what God had given him. In 1 Corinthians 16:1–24, Paul called disciples to that same intentional generosity. A disciple is built different, choosing to live with sacrificial generosity.

OPTION 3: THE PAID-OFF DEBT LETTER

We have probably all seen one of those stories where someone discovers that a friend, a coworker, or even a complete stranger needs a kidney and decides to find out if they are a match. In 2016, twenty-seven-year-old Dylan Matthews took it even further. He volunteered to donate a kidney without knowing who would receive it. His donation eventually helped start a chain that resulted in four people receiving kidney transplants.

That kind of generosity gets our attention because you cannot give a kidney without it costing you something. Dylan gave something that was actually part of him, went through surgery, and accepted the inconvenience and risk involved because someone else needed what he could give. Sacrificial generosity moves beyond giving what we will never miss.

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- *Why do stories about living organ donors tend to get our attention?*
- *Have you ever given an unexpected gift to someone to bless them? Tell us about it.*
- *What makes giving a kidney different from giving away something you no longer need?*

Transition Statement from Attention Grabber to Text:
A living kidney donor gives us a vivid picture of generosity. In 1 Corinthians 16 Paul closed his letter by showing the Corinthians that sacrificial generosity is part of the life of a disciple. Disciples do not simply give from what they will never miss. They intentionally use what God has given them for the good of others.

2 SET THE STAGE

LEADER TIP

This section provides the historical, cultural, and literary context needed to properly interpret and apply the text.

OUTLINE

I. Greetings and Thanksgiving (1:1–9)
II. Problems in the church (1:10–6:20)
  A. Divisions and factions (1:10–4:21)
  B. Gross immorality (5:1–13)
  C. Litigation before pagan courts (6:1–11)
  D. Fornication with prostitutes (6:12–20)
III. Replies to questions from the Corinthians (7:1–14:40)
  A. Questions about marriage (7:1–40)
  B. Limitations of Christian liberty (8:1–11:1)
  C. Veiling of women in public worship (11:2–16)
  D. Disorderly behavior at the Lord's Supper (11:17–34)
  E. Exercise of spiritual gifts (12:1–14:40)
IV. The Resurrection of the Body (15:1–58)
  A. Centrality of Christ's resurrection (15:1–20)
  B. Sequence of resurrection events (15:21–28)
  C. The resurrection and suffering (15:29–34)
  D. Nature of the resurrection body (15:35–49)
  E. The believer's victory over death (15:50–58)
V. Conclusion (16:1–24)
  A. Collection for the believers at Jerusalem (16:1–4)
  B. Paul's plans for visiting Corinth (16:5–9)
  C. Exhortations, instructions, and salutations (16:10–24)[1]

CONTEXT

Paul had just finished his long defense of the resurrection by telling the Corinthians to "stand firm," to let nothing move them, and to "always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord" (15:58). Chapter 16 shows what that looks like in everyday life. Paul began by talking about a collection for believers in Jerusalem who were experiencing significant need. This was not meant to be a last-minute offering. Each believer was to regularly set aside money "in keeping with your income" so the church would be prepared to give when Paul arrived (16:1–4). The Corinthians were joining churches in Galatia and elsewhere in a larger effort to care for fellow believers.

The rest of the chapter broadens that picture of discipleship. Paul held his own travel plans under the Lord's direction, encouraged the church to receive and support Timothy, and honored people, like Stephanas, who had "devoted themselves to the service of the Lord's people" (16:15). He gathered several commands together: "stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong" and "do everything in love" (16:13–14). First Corinthians ends by showing that a life shaped by the gospel is lived out in practical and intentional ways.

[1] F. Alan Tomlinson, "1 Corinthians," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1811.

FALLEN CONDITION FOCUS

Sin turns what God gives us inward. We hold tightly to our money, protect our comfort, avoid costly service, and hesitate when obedience requires courage. Even our generosity can become selective or self-serving, offered only when it costs little or benefits people we already value. Left to ourselves, we naturally ask, "What can I keep?" rather than, "How can what God has given me be used for the good of others?"

GOSPEL RESPONSE

Jesus did not hold back what was His. He gave Himself for sinners, becoming poor for our sake so that through His poverty we might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). Through His death and resurrection, Christ frees us from living for ourselves and makes us part of a people who have received far more than we could ever repay. Because Jesus generously gave Himself to us, disciples can hold their resources loosely, serve others willingly, stand courageously, and let everything they do be shaped by love.

DISCIPLESHIP RHYTHM: SACRIFICIAL GENEROSITY

Sacrificial generosity is a spiritual rhythm. Disciples intentionally choose to leverage their resources—skills, time, possessions, finances—for God's work and the good of others. Giving moves from something occasional or accidental to something disciples plan for. In 1 Corinthians 16, Paul told each believer to regularly set aside money "in keeping with your income" so they would be ready to meet the needs of fellow believers (16:2).

This rhythm teaches disciples to see money as something God has entrusted to them, not something that exists only for their own comfort or security. Sacrificial generosity looks different for each person, depending on what God has provided, but the posture is the same: disciples hold what they have with open hands and willingly give in intentionally planned ways for the good of others.

3 LOOK AT THE BOOK

LEADER TIP

In this section, you will find exercises you can use to lead your group through Observation, Interpretation, and Application. As the leader, work through all the exercises below to ensure you understand the text well.

1 Corinthians 16:1–4 The phrase "now about" in verse 1 is the same transition Paul used earlier when responding to matters raised by the Corinthians (see 7:1, 8:1, 12:1). The collection was apparently something they already knew about. Paul was organizing financial relief for impoverished believers in Jerusalem, with Gentile churches in several regions participating (Romans 15:25–27; 2 Corinthians 8–9). Their gift, therefore, did more than relieve poverty. Gentile believers were caring materially for Jewish believers hundreds of miles away, giving visible expression to the unity the gospel had created.

Paul gave no fixed amount. Instead, "each one" was to set money aside "in keeping with your income." The underlying expression refers to giving in proportion to how one has prospered. The same instruction could therefore apply to believers with very different financial situations. Paul expected participation from the whole church without pretending everyone had the same capacity to give.

The weekly practice was designed to keep the offering intentional and planned. It was not to be a hurried response to Paul's arrival or given from whatever someone had left over. There is some debate over whether "set aside" means the money was deposited into a church treasury each week or saved privately until the collection was gathered. The Greek can naturally mean setting it aside "by oneself," so the verse should not be pressed into giving us a detailed description of an early Christian offering service. Paul's emphasis is clearer than the mechanics: decide regularly, set aside intentionally, don't give from what is left over, and have the gift ready rather than depending on a last-minute appeal.

Verse 3 adds another interesting detail. The NIV's "gift" translates charis, the ordinary Greek word for "grace." Here the word means a gracious gift or benefaction. Paul used the same grace language repeatedly when discussing generosity in 2 Corinthians 8–9. Christian giving is not merely the transfer of money. Paul described the act itself as an expression of grace.

The Corinthians themselves would approve the people who carried the money to Jerusalem. Paul did not insist on personally controlling the funds. The church chose trusted representatives, and Paul supplied letters of introduction. For a substantial, multi-church collection, Paul built accountability into the process rather than asking people simply to trust his intentions.

1 Corinthians 16:5–9 Paul's travel plans sound tentative because they were. He intended to pass through Macedonia and hoped to spend an extended time in Corinth "if the Lord permits" (v. 7). This was not an excuse for refusing to plan. Paul had a route and a strategy. He simply refused to treat a plan as though it were a promise about a future he controlled.

The phrase "help me on my journey" in verse 6 means more than waving goodbye. The verb was commonly used for helping a traveler continue a journey, which could include escort, supplies, hospitality, or

other practical support. Paul expected a healthy relationship between a missionary and a church to include material participation in the mission.

Paul remained in Ephesus because "a great door for effective work" had opened, even though "there are many who oppose me" (v. 9). Those two statements belong together. Paul did not use opposition as a simple test for whether God had opened or closed a door. A fruitful opportunity can also be a contested one.

That language also carries chapter 15 into chapter 16. Paul had just told the Corinthians that their labor "in the Lord is not in vain" (15:58). Now he described staying in a difficult place precisely because there was meaningful work to do. Resurrection hope does not remove costly labor. It explains why the labor is worth continuing.

1 Corinthians 16:10–12 Paul's concern for Timothy fits what we already know about Corinth's unhealthy way of evaluating leaders. The church had been impressed by status, rhetoric, power, and personality from the beginning of the letter. Timothy was not to be treated with contempt, because the relevant question was not whether he impressed them. Paul said, "He is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am" (v. 10). Faithful work, not personal prestige, established the basis for how they should receive him.

"Send him on his way" uses the same verb Paul used for himself in verse 6. He expected the Corinthians to support Timothy practically so he could continue his ministry. Generosity in this chapter therefore includes more than the Jerusalem collection. Churches use their resources to care for people in need and to sustain people doing the Lord's work.

Apollos is especially worth noticing because he was one of the names around which the Corinthians had divided themselves (1:12; 3:4–6). Paul, however, "strongly urged" Apollos to visit Corinth. There was no rivalry between the two men corresponding to the rivalry the Corinthians had created around them.

Paul also could not simply order Apollos to go. Apollos decided not to make the trip at that time and would come later when the opportunity arose. This brief note gives us a useful picture of early Christian ministry: coworkers share a mission without one apostle micromanaging every movement of every other worker.

1 Corinthians 16:13–14 Verse 13 contains four commands in rapid succession: "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong." "Stand firm" reaches back naturally to 15:58, where Paul used the same command after defending the resurrection. Here "the faith" is best understood not merely as the strength of their personal belief but as the gospel truth in which they were to remain settled.

The NIV's "be courageous" translates the unusual verb *andrizomai*. Literally, it comes from the word for "man" and could be rendered "act like men" or "show yourselves courageous." It was a conventional way of calling people to bravery, much like the repeated Old Testament command to "be strong and courageous." The NIV communicates the force rather than preserving the gendered idiom.

Verse 14 prevents the commands in verse 13 from being misunderstood: "Do everything in love." That is not a new subject. It reaches directly

back to chapters 12–14, especially Paul's argument in chapter 13 that impressive gifts without love amount to nothing. The Corinthians needed firmness, courage, and strength, but all those qualities needed to operate within the command that governed Paul's correction of their gifts, freedoms, relationships, and divisions: love.

1 Corinthians 16:15–18 Stephanas has appeared before. Paul mentioned baptizing his household in 1:16. Here he called them the "first converts" in Achaia. The Greek is literally "firstfruits," the first portion of a harvest that anticipates more to come. Stephanas's household represents some of the earliest fruit of the gospel in the region.

Paul said they "devoted themselves to the service of the Lord's people." The wording is unusually strong. The Greek says they "set" or "appointed themselves" to this ministry. No appointment to an official title is mentioned. They saw the needs of believers and deliberately gave themselves to meeting them. This is a model for disciples to follow. Sacrificial generosity is a rhythm not limited to church initiative, formal role, or organized project. It is a lifestyle.

That explains the instruction in verse 16 to "submit to such people." Corinth had repeatedly confused spiritual importance with status, visibility, knowledge, or impressive gifts. Paul pointed them to another measure of leadership: look for the people who give themselves to serving others and recognize their influence.

Verse 18 describes the result of that kind of ministry: Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus "refreshed" Paul's spirit and the Corinthians' spirit. Paul did not tell the church merely to admire such people. "Such men deserve recognition." A church learns something about its values by the kind of people it chooses to notice and honor.

1 Corinthians 16:19–20 Aquila and Priscilla had lived and worked with Paul in Corinth before relocating to Ephesus (Acts 18:1–3, 18–19). Now they, along with the church meeting in their home, sent greetings back to Corinth. The greeting makes visible the early Christian network. These were not isolated congregations operating independently of one another. People moved, carried letters, supported ministry, opened homes, and maintained relationships between churches.

The command to "greet one another with a holy kiss" uses an ordinary cultural sign of affection and marks it as "holy." Paul was not introducing romance into the gathering. He was telling a deeply divided congregation to receive one another with the affection appropriate to a family made holy in Christ.

That matters after the letter we have just read. These people had divided over leaders, sued one another, humiliated poorer believers at the Lord's Supper, and competed over spiritual gifts. Paul did not envision unity as merely agreeing to stop arguing. He expected restored relationships to take visible form.

1 Corinthians 16:21–24 Paul noted that the final greeting was written "in my own hand." His letters were commonly written with the assistance of a secretary, but he could add a closing line personally as a mark of authenticity (see also Galatians 6:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:17). The change of handwriting would have been visible to the original recipients.

Verse 22 is deliberately severe: "If anyone does not love the Lord, let that person be cursed!" After sixteen chapters addressing divisions, sexuality, worship, freedom, spiritual gifts, and resurrection, Paul identified the basic dividing line as being a person's relationship to Jesus. Christianity cannot finally be reduced to adopting Paul's advice about church life. The question is whether someone belongs to and loves the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul then used the Aramaic expression *Maranatha*. The NIV renders it "Come, Lord!" The exact division of the Aramaic expression allows slightly different senses, such as "Our Lord, come" or "Our Lord is coming," but either way it points to the coming of Jesus. Paul preserved the Aramaic expression inside a Greek letter rather than translating it.

The final two verses place "grace" and "love" beside the severe warning of verse 22: "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love to all of you in Christ Jesus." Paul spent much of the letter correcting the Corinthians, but correction did not cancel his affection. His goal throughout had been to bring a fractured church back under the grace of Christ and into a life ordered by love.

1 CORINTHIANS 16:1–24

16 Now about the collection for the Lord's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. 2 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. 3 Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. 4 If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me.

5 After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you—for I will be going through Macedonia. 6 Perhaps I will stay with you for a while, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go. 7 For I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. 8 But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, 9 because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me.

10 When Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am. 11 No one, then, should treat him with contempt. Send him on his way in peace so that he may return to me. I am expecting him along with the brothers.

12 Now about our brother Apollos: I strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers. He was quite unwilling to go now, but he will go when he has the opportunity.

13 Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. 14 Do everything in love.

15 You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the Lord's people. I urge you, brothers and sisters, 16 to submit to such people and to everyone who joins in the work and labors at it. 17 I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you. 18 For they refreshed my spirit and

yours also. Such men deserve recognition.
19 The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla y greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house. 20 All the brothers and sisters here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

21 I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand.

22 If anyone does not love the Lord, let that person be cursed! Come, Lord!

23 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.

24 My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen.[2]

OBSERVATION: WHAT DOES IT SAY?

Gather in groups of three to discuss the Observation and Interpretation questions.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 1: GIVING FOR THE LORD'S PEOPLE

Read 1 Corinthians 16:1–4. Paul gave the Corinthian church instructions about collecting money to support and bless the church in Jerusalem. Make a list of his instructions.

Suggested Response: Paul told each person to set aside money on the first day of every week. The amount should be "in keeping with your income," and the money should be prepared before Paul arrived. The Corinthians were also to choose approved representatives to carry the gift to Jerusalem. Paul said he would provide letters for them and might travel with them if appropriate.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 2: PLANS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND FELLOW WORKERS

Read 1 Corinthians 16:5–12. What did Paul say about his ministry plans? What did he say about how the Corinthian church should receive Timothy?

Suggested Response: Paul planned to travel through Macedonia and hoped to spend time with the Corinthians "if the Lord permits." For now, he would remain in Ephesus because "a great door for effective work" had opened even though there were many opponents. Paul told the Corinthians to receive Timothy without giving him reason to fear and to send him on his way in peace. Paul also said he strongly encouraged Apollos to visit Corinth, but Apollos was not willing to come at that time.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 3: STAND FIRM, SERVE, AND LOVE

Read 1 Corinthians 16:13–24. What commands did Paul give as he closed the letter? What examples? What final greetings?

Suggested Response: Paul told the Corinthians to be on guard, stand firm in the faith, be courageous, be strong, and do everything in love. He pointed to the household of Stephanas, who devoted themselves

[2]The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 1 Corinthians 16:1–24.

to serving the Lord's people, and told the church to submit to people who worked and labored like them. He said Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus refreshed his spirit and deserved recognition. He closed with greetings from other believers, told them to greet one another with a holy kiss, warned anyone who did not love the Lord, prayed for the Lord to come, and ended with the grace of Jesus and his love for them in Christ.

INTERPRETATION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 1: GENEROSITY IS INTENTIONAL

Why did Paul give the Corinthians specific instructions about the financial collection? He used ideas like giving regularly, proportionally, and in advance.

Suggested Response: Paul was teaching the Corinthians to make generosity a deliberate pattern rather than an emotional reaction to a need. "Each one" participates, but the amount was "in keeping with your income," so Paul expected different people to give according to what God had provided. Setting the money aside regularly also meant the gift would be ready when the need arose. Sacrificial generosity is not merely spontaneous. Disciples intentionally order their resources so they are prepared to use them for the good of others.

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 2: PLANS BELONG TO THE LORD

Paul explained his ministry plans to the Corinthian church. What do we learn from Paul as he talked about his plans? How did he think about making plans and being open to God's direction?

Suggested Response: Paul planned carefully without assuming he controlled the future. He intended to visit Corinth but added "if the Lord permits." He also remained in Ephesus because there was fruitful work to do, even though that opportunity came with significant opposition. Timothy and Apollos had their own roles and schedules within the same mission. Paul's example shows that serving the Lord involves wise planning, flexibility, perseverance, and cooperation with others rather than controlling every circumstance or person.

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 3: STRENGTH TAKES THE SHAPE OF LOVE AND SERVICE

In verses 13–18, Paul connected being courageous with loving and serving others. How are all three related? How does a disciple live out all three at the same time?

Suggested Response: Paul did not describe Christian strength as dominance or self-protection. He immediately commanded the Corinthians to "do everything in love" and then pointed to Stephanas and his household, who had devoted themselves to serving God's people, as examples. The people Paul told the church to recognize were not those who demanded status but those who labored for others. Christian courage stands firmly in the faith while strength expresses itself through love, service, generosity, and concern for the good of the church.

LEADER TIP

In this section, you will find questions to choose from that will help your group consider how God calls them to respond to the text. Help your group set measurable action steps.

Leaders – share your story with your group. It takes 3-5 minutes. You are modeling this for your group, so follow the guidelines. (Click here for the guidelines).

Challenge – group people into 2's or 3's and have them prepare to share their story with each other next week. Set aside 15-20 minutes of your group time for this.

APPLICATION: HOW DO I RESPOND?

QUESTION 1: This final chapter of 1 Corinthians touches on sacrificial giving, sacrificial serving, and sacrificial relationships with others. Which of these comes easiest for you? Why?

Suggested Response: Use this question to get your group discussing the chapter and what God is stirring in their heart. As your group responds, use follow-up questions to guide below surface-level responses. A good question to ask when someone responds is "Why?" or "Tell us more about …"

QUESTION 2: Paul said to regularly set aside money to bless the Jerusalem church. Do you have an intentional plan for financial generosity? What could you live without to increase your availability to give?

Suggested Response: I may tend to give only when someone asks, when I feel moved, or when I happen to have extra. I could begin setting aside a specific amount or percentage regularly, include generosity in my budget, or create financial margin so I am prepared to give when needs arise. The goal is not simply to give more in one moment but to build generosity into the way I manage what God provides.

As your group responds, use follow-up questions to guide below surface-level responses. Encourage transparent responses.

QUESTION 3: What things challenge your financial generosity right now?

Suggested Response: I may tell myself I will be generous when I earn more, pay something off, have more time, feel more secure, or reach a different stage of life. Those may be legitimate goals, but they can also become reasons to postpone generosity indefinitely. I can begin by asking what faithfulness looks like with the money, time, home, abilities, and opportunities God has already given me, today.

QUESTION 4: Paul loved and served the Ephesians even though he faced opposition. What life difficulties cause you to pull away from ministry opportunities? Tell us about a time this happened. What did you miss out on?

Suggested Response: I may be tempted to withdraw from serving, giving, discipling someone, repairing a relationship, or taking responsibility because it has become inconvenient or difficult. Difficulty does not automatically mean I am doing the wrong thing. I need wisdom to distinguish between a closed door and costly faithfulness.

QUESTION 5: Stephanas and his household "devoted themselves to the service of the Lord's people." Where could you deliberately give more of yourself for the good of others?

Suggested Response: I may be able to give time, attention, hospitality, practical help, financial resources, encouragement, or consistent service. Devotion to service means more than occasionally helping when it fits easily into my schedule. I can identify one person or need and decide beforehand how I will serve rather than wait to see whether I feel like doing it.

QUESTION 6: What is one specific act of sacrificial generosity you can practice this week?

Suggested Response: I could give financially to a real need, increase regular giving to the church, provide a meal, help someone with an expense, open my home, invest several hours to serve someone, or use something I own for another person's benefit. The action should be specific enough that I know whether I followed through. Sacrificial generosity moves from agreeing that generosity is good to intentionally giving something God has placed in my hands.

QUESTION 7: How can our group help one another practice sacrificial generosity?

Suggested Response: We can talk honestly about needs, plan a serving opportunity together, encourage one another to take another step in giving intentionally, and make generosity something we practice as a community rather than only as individuals. We can also pay attention to needs within the group and ask how God may have already given us the resources, time, or abilities to meet them.

4 CHALLENGE

LEADER TIP

End your study time with one final challenge and prayer. Your final challenge should pull together everything you covered in this lesson and call your participants to action.

Disciples are built different because they live with sacrificial generosity. Paul told the Corinthians not to wait until a need was directly in front of them before deciding whether to give. They were to regularly set something aside according to what God had provided. The rest of the chapter shows the same open-handed posture in other areas of life as believers supported gospel workers, devoted themselves to serving others, stood firm when faithfulness was costly, and did everything in love.

This week, look honestly at what God has placed in your hands and decide how you can use it for someone else's good.

- Where have you been waiting to be generous until you have more?
- What could you begin setting aside or make available now so you are prepared to give when a need arises?
- What is one specific way you can give sacrificially this week through your money, time, resources, or service?

Sacrificial generosity does not begin when we finally have the elusive "enough." It begins when we recognize that what we have has been entrusted to us by God to steward and intentionally make room to use it for His purposes and the good of others. Close by asking God to make your group increasingly open-handed with everything He has provided.

Let's pray.