

## “Spiritual Planning”

*1 Corinthians 16:1-12*

As we turn the page from one of the greatest theological passages in the entire New Testament (Ch. 15), it seems like a letdown in Ch. 16 to talk about money. As if we now leave the spiritual to talk about non-spiritual things. But nothing could be farther from the truth. But if Ps. 24:1 is true,

*The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;*

Then everything is spiritual because everything we have belongs to God including our resources. Paul's not the only one to connect theology into practical living. Peter writes in 2 Pet. 3:14, after warning about Jesus' return and pointing out that this earth we're standing on is going to completely cleansed with fire in the future,

*<sup>14</sup> So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.*

Knowing God's Word is supposed to conform us into practical, godly people while we're here. I like this passage from 1 Pet. 4:7-10 too.

*<sup>7</sup> The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear-minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. <sup>8</sup> Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. <sup>9</sup> Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. <sup>10</sup> Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.*

The end of all things is near – so make friends, forgive people, have them over to your house and stop being a grump. Knowing God's Word should change the way we talk and live and handle our money too.

As we've seen since Ch. 7, Paul has been addressing questions the Corinthians had for Paul. Here's two more answers to questions asked,

*Now about the collection for God's people*

*<sup>12</sup> Now about our brother Apollos*

Often at the end of his letters Paul will talk about people and his plans for ministry. This collection, as we'll see shortly, was part of his plan to get to Jerusalem so he can minister to people. Paul was a planner but he didn't worship his Google calendar. Paul was a spiritual planner which meant he planned his life around ministering to people. Both of these questions were about people and he talks about Timothy and some more as we finish the letter next week. As Paul answers the question about a specific offering he was collecting for the poor believers in Jerusalem there are some general principles that we can draw on about giving to the Lord. And the main one Paul wants to emphasize here is ...

**Be Prepared to Give**  
**(16:1-4)**

While we don't know what he told the Galatian churches about this collection, we do learn what this collection is for in Galatians 2:9-10. By the way, Galatians was the first letter Paul wrote chronologically. Explaining how he started out in ministry and met Peter, James and John, the leaders of the early church, he states

*2:8 For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles. <sup>9</sup> James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews. <sup>10</sup> All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.*

Specifically, the poor believers in Jerusalem. When giving his defense to Governor Felix while under house arrest, Paul shared in Acts 24:17

*17 "After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings*

Everywhere Paul went he collected money for poverty-infected believers in Jerusalem. His plan was to encourage believers to set aside some money during their week and bring it with them on Sunday when they usually gathered for worship. No emotional plea during the service. No pressure tactics to get more. Just encourage people to look at how God was meeting their needs and to give from their excess. What does our giving go to?

### ***For ministry and people's needs (v.1)***

In numerous places in his letters Paul thanked believers for how they gave towards his needs related to his ministry. And ministry is always about people's needs. Material needs especially but also spiritual needs. This collection for the poor in Jerusalem was for the church there. Why were they so poor? Two main reasons:

- 1) A prophet named Agabus prophesied there would be a severe famine that would spread over the entire Roman world (Acts 11:27). Since large cities like Jerusalem contain the most people, they will get hit the hardest.
- 2) Spiritual persecution (Acts 8:1) was widespread persecution can lead to job loss, houses confiscated and other tragedies like that. Poor people can't just leave since they have very limited resources. We already know from Acts 6 there were many widows in the church and widows and their children suffer greatly without a husband's/father's income.

When Paul saw a need, he wanted to help people out spiritually and materially.

Another helpful piece of wisdom that comes from this is that our giving should be

### ***Consistently according to God's provision (v.2)***

*<sup>2</sup> On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.*

It's a great practice for us to set aside in our budgets as we get paid, our gifts for this ministry and other ministries too ( I pray you give to other ministries on top of what we do here). Weekly was Paul's suggestion simply because people got paid every day, and you saved it up for when you came for worship. "In keeping with our income" also refers to when, because not many got paid weekly. The

basic principle to giving is planned beforehand and consistently as we receive income. And I think that should apply to special times when we receive unique gifts, refunds, inheritances, tax returns – all those are ways God blesses us and should be ways we bless God's people. There are occasions when a special need arises and we call people to give towards a needy family as we are moved but the majority of time our giving should be part of our budgeting process as consistently as we put money aside for our bills.

By the way, I have no clue what anyone gives and I have no desire to know what anyone gives. I have never had anyone come up to me and insinuate that because they give a significant portion they have more say in church matters (although I have heard horror stories from other pastors). That's between you, your spouse and God. Ignorance on some matters is bliss.

Our giving must be prepared beforehand for the needs of God's people, in consistent planned out manner (yet open to emergency situations for sure) because one of the best benefits that happens when we do this is

### ***In order to build unity in Christ (vv.3-4)***

*<sup>3</sup> Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup> If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me.*

Paul recommended letters and people sent along with the gift for two reasons. First, it provided accountability. That everyone knew where the gift was from, how it was collected and how much was given. Always need healthy accountability practices when handling people's money; ministry and business. Secondly, this gift was going to Jewish believers given by predominantly Gentile believers. This division was a constant obstruction to unity in the early church. When the Jewish believers received this gift from Gentile believers it built unity in the body of Christ. When we give towards a ministry we create a partnership. We strengthen our relation-ship with those we support.

It was very humbling, and I was overwhelmed by how big a deal it was for Arthur, Michelle and I to go to Honduras and meet Melodie Francis and work with Rick and Ena Ward and do crafts and play with the kids there. And give your gifts of clothes to our sponsored children. There's an extra connection we now have because we have been with these people. And you've probably had similar experiences traveling somewhere and meeting believers you have corresponded with. Look what Paul said in Rom. 15:26-27, when he mentioned his plans to get to Jerusalem:

*<sup>26</sup> For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.*

*<sup>27</sup> They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.*

Through Paul's teaching and preaching, Gentile believers who were saved understood the gospel was for the Jew first and also the Gentiles. We owe our spiritual heritage to Jewish believers. How can we not thank God for them by helping them out in any way we can. Because God is committed to Jewish evangelism and spiritual growth, we purposely support Jewish evangelism and church growth here in Canada through the Grossmans and in Jerusalem with the Stover's because God's promise to Abraham still applies:

*Gen. 12:3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*

Paul transitions now to his general travelling plans and his plans to get to Jerusalem with their gift. When we look at how Paul made plans he models for us our need to

## **Plan Our Life Around God's Purposes** **(16:5-12)**

I think too many Christians see their work life and recreational life and their relationship with God as separate. Which is sad because it's not a healthy biblical perspective. Once we're saved our life is all about God's purposes and we need to think about our life from His perspective and plan accordingly; even if most of our life is taken up with work and family. Once we are saved we are adopted into God's family and we have a responsibility for the rest of our earthly lives to

### ***Encourage believers (vv.5-7)***

Paul write to the Galatians,

*6:7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. 8 The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. 9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

Every little thing we do is sowing. Every decision and every act we perform and every word we speak is sowing. And we reap the benefits or consequences of that sowing. Here Paul says don't become weary in doing good – why? Because there's so much bad in the world we who know God are the ones primarily who can spread true good in the world. And it's tiring. So, do good especially to fellow believers. We need to be encouraged.

I know God's will for your life did you know that? Because I know what His will for my life is for every day. His general will. Glorify Him and encourage believers (as well as unbelievers). Which means every day we need to begin our day with this prayer, *'Thank you Lord for saving me, by graciously adopting me into your family. I'm going to work today surrounded by people who don't know You. I need to be a positive spark in their dark world. I need to show the who You are by the way I work, by the better words I say about people and if you give me an opportunity, a chance to share your joy, the gospel of Jesus.'*

Every day we are going to meet people; some of the same ones regularly, but also a few new ones. Paul made plans around people. 'But he was in ministry; I'm not in ministry', you're thinking to yourself. Yet if you're thinking your job or your responsibilities are not about ministering to people, then I don't think you fully understand what it means to be saved. God saved you to serve people; in your job, around your neighborhood, on the playing field and in local businesses. We need to make plans in our life around the people God puts in our way. This was Paul's plans.

He wanted to get to Corinth. At the moment, he was in Ephesus. Let's look at this on a map. If you're task oriented and you wanted to get to Corinth so you can say you accomplished your task, what would you do? Take a ship and get there asap. But Paul says, I'm going to Macedonia first in my journey to see you. That's not practical. That's going to cost more. It's going to make you late and you'll miss the first period of the hockey game. It's an inconvenience. Or rather, those people are an inconvenience.

We task-oriented people are slow learners because God is more concerned about the people we need to connect with, than in accomplishing our tasks then He is with our tasks. Paul's plan to go through Macedonia was to minister to people there and arrive in Corinth during the winter when he knows no ships will go on the sea and he'll spend the whole winter with them. And for the Corinthians, that was helpful too. Oh, Paul isn't coming directly now because he wants to spend more time with us in the winter. I get it. That's a better plan. 'if the Lord permits' we say because God has a tendency to change our plans since He has other people He wants us to interact with.

And while this plan around Macedonia initially sounds like it's a good plan; it's actually a harder plan. Paul planned his life around God's purposes

***Not just when it's convenient (vv.8-9)***<sup>8</sup> *But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, <sup>9</sup> because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me.*

Paul saw opposition as part of God's open doors for ministry. If we're honest, we prefer convenience and as little opposition as possible. We sometimes avoid ministry and people for this very reason. Paul called it a "great door for effective work" even though it also would be hard. We need to make room in our theology that God's plans for us do not always involve ease and comfort. And similarly, we need to

### ***Be flexible to God's agenda (vv.7, 10-12)***

Paul's plans also included other people could minister to the Corinthians. He was probably sending Timothy to come but he also said, "if he comes". He instructed the Corinthians to be nice to him (why would Timothy be afraid? Possibly because he was young according to 1 Tim. 4:12) and for them to 'send him on his way' which was a way of saying supply what he needs for his expenses.

And if you recall, many of them preferred Apollos over Paul. Paul and Apollos got along fine and Paul had no trouble sending Apollos to them but it seems Apollos didn't want to go to Corinth!

<sup>12</sup> *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.*

Somewhat ironic wasn't it? But notice the phrases in these verses:

*if the Lord permits. (v.7)*

*If Timothy comes (v.10)*

*so that he may return to me (v.11)*

*he will go when he has the opportunity (v.12)*

Paul made plans. He had his agenda but he was flexible and always allowed room for God to work His agenda in his life. Because that's what God does doesn't He?

God is sovereign over the world and over our lives. He saved us. He has plans for us. His plans always involve believers He wants us to encourage and people He wants us to reach for Christ. And He has a habit of disrupting our task-focused minds to look at people. He'll change our plans because we need to bring Him glory through a difficulty. He'll lead us into hard things at times because people need to see how believers treat each other and respond to difficulties.

Keep making your plans and be prepared give where God is working. God honours that, clearly. But be flexible, be open to God's agenda. Make people more important than your tasks or jobs. Even if you're at home all day with children. Think about everything you say and do as sowing

seeds that result in growth or damage. And remember, your life is not about you, it's about God's purposes through you. Remember these verses:

*Rom. 11:36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen*

*Col. 3:17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

*1 Cor. 10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*

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