

**FROM APATHY TO GENEROSITY**  
**The Journey to Deep – Part 10**  
**1 Corinthians 16**

A man said to his friend, “Today, I heard the greatest speaker. He told us that all of life’s problems can be traced to one of two things: ignorance or apathy. What do you think of that?”

His friend replied, “I don’t know, and I don’t care!”

Well, how do we make the move from being apathetic to becoming generous? As the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays are upon us, I’m always reminded of the Charles Dickens’ classic story, *A Christmas Carol*, which has been retold now for almost 180 years. Everybody knows what a “Scrooge” is just from saying the term. But the more you dig into Scrooge’s character the more you realize that Ebenezer Scrooge didn’t hate people, it’s just that he didn’t care about people. He was just APATHETIC. He didn’t care enough about them to love them.

We’re going to dive right in this morning, so I hope you’ve got the note page out of your bulletin already.

Fill this in on your note page: **The opposite of love is not hate; it is apathy.**

Today were going to conclude our series of messages from 1 Corinthians, so turn with me to the last chapter of 1 Corinthians—chapter 16. At times we can be apathetic and unloving. Evidently Paul wanted to make certain that the Corinthians didn’t make that mistake. He wanted them to be good stewards in every arena.

So, the key Verse of 1 Corinthians 16 is verse 14, which reads: **“Do everything in love.”** That’s our driving, guiding, motivating factor.

Now the reason we want to move from apathy to generosity goes deeper than just not being a scrooge. Jesus has doled out a variety of resources to His people so that we will be His conduit to declare His glory to the nations. If we hoard His resources, if we waste the time He’s entrusted to us, we are hoarding what does not rightly belong to us and we’re hindering the spread of the Gospel.

Let’s take a look at a definition of stewardship just as a backdrop. The Definition of Stewardship is: **The responsibility to take care of something one does not own.**

That's the responsibility we have when we have been entrusted as a steward on behalf of the Lord. And normally when we think of stewardship or generosity, we always think of giving money. And while that's true, we need to see that generosity goes far beyond that.

**So today I want us to look in this final chapter of 1 Corinthians as Paul encourages the church to be generous in several different ways...**

## **I. GIVE GENEROUSLY OF YOUR MONEY.**

Now the first area he talks about is to **give generously of your money.**

That comes as no surprise. Remember in this letter to the Corinthians Paul is answering some of the questions that they have asked. So, to their credit, they must have asked something about how they could be involved in helping the poorer Christians who were living in Jerusalem.

**And Paul begins by teaching us that giving is an act of worship.**

Let's read 1 Corinthians 16, verses 1 and the beginning of 2: *"Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income...."*

Look again at the first part of verse 2: *"On the first day of every week..."* Why the first day of every week? Because they came together that day for worship...that was the day that the Lord conquered the grave.

And giving was an important part of worship. It begins in the Old Testament, starting with Cain and Abel, when the Jewish believers would bring their offerings to God. It was a form of worship. Over in the New Testament, Jesus told the Pharisees that to give their tithe (ten percent of their income) was the right thing to do. But Christ goes on to say that we, His followers, should exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees. So, giving is a way to worship. And it's also a way to give thanks. In this passage Paul tells them that they can do that by setting aside a special offering each week for the poor in the church of Jerusalem.

We offer to God our tithes and offerings each week...and then there are special times when we need to take up an offering for a special mission or need that the church has – like the church did after 9/11, or after destructive tornados, or to help with the clean-up efforts after devastating hurricanes. That's what was taking place here for the Jerusalem Christians.

**Paul, in these few verses, gives us a simple and systematic plan and he teaches that giving should be done regularly and proportionately.**

Read 1 Corinthians 16:2: *“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.”*

One of the challenges that we face is that, as you progress through the seasons of life and your income increases, you should try to increase your percentage of giving to the Lord and others—as an expression that you depend more on Him than you do on the externals. But sometimes that’s easier said than done, because the more money we make the more complicated we allow our lives to become. But when we do that and we increase that percentage, what we are communicating to God is essentially this, “You know what, God. These externals are secondary to me. You are the priority in my life.”

And so, you begin to look for some mission organizations, or a Christian college, or some need that is close to your heart that you can begin to support.

Over in the second book of Corinthians, Paul is talking to the church at Corinth about the Macedonians, and he says, *“Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ...As it is written: ‘He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever’”* (2 Corinthians 9:7 & 9).

I love that phrase, “He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor.” That’s what God does with our offerings each weekend. Did you know that about 10 cents of every dollar that you give here is going to those who are in need and those on mission fields – locally, nationally, and globally – who can be reached with the good news that Jesus loves them and that there is a way to have the last laugh on death? What you give to this church God scatters abroad...His gifts to the poor.

**You see, thirdly, the gifts you give should be handled ethically by the ministry.**

If you, the giver, don’t have that level of confidence in the church or the benevolent organization then you won’t feel comfortable or compelled to give. That’s why Paul says in verse 3: *“Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem.”*

Notice he says that the “men you approve” – in other words those individuals who’ve proven to be trustworthy – will deliver every penny that is given to those in Jerusalem who are in need. Paul was ethical when it came to handling the Corinthians’ money. He didn’t want them to think it was about him. He would help them, but they should collect, count, and have someone to take the money.

Unfortunately, the Corinthians struggled with apathy when it came to giving. The Corinthians needed to learn an important lesson when it comes to generosity. Paul had to come back to this theme again in his next letter to the church at Corinth when he strongly encourages them in 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9 to finish the work of collecting the money for the Jerusalem saints.

Obviously, the church in Corinth began this act of generosity by laying aside money each week...but it was short lived. As time went by, they began to forget the urgency of Paul's message and apathy set in so they stopped contributing to this special outreach fund for the church in Jerusalem.

So, Paul writes to them again and in this letter (in 2 Corinthians, chapter 8) he uses the Macedonian churches as an example of poor churches giving generously out of their poverty. He reminds them that they had not completed this act of grace they had begun. Look at verses 10 and 11 of 2 Corinthians 8: *"Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means"* (2 Cor. 8:10b, 11).

Now I want to remind you of something with this spot where we are right now in 1 Corinthians 16. Remember that there were no "chapter breaks" in the original manuscripts, so it just read like an extremely long letter – because that's what it was. So think back to what I preached about last week at the conclusion of 1 Corinthians 15. Because Jesus conquered death and resurrected, every Christian can do the same thing. And Paul goes straight from a lengthy discussion of the resurrection to now talking about the giving of tithes and offerings. Just in one verse of time he makes the switch. For some reason Paul uses that truth – that distinctive of our faith, the resurrection of Christ – to segue into talking about giving generously. Does that seem strange to you? It shouldn't—because Paul is saying our monetary giving is not in vain because our Lord is alive. It is because of His resurrection that we are motivated to give so that nonbelievers will come to belief and believers who are in need can be encouraged.

## II. GIVE GENEROUSLY OF YOUR TIME.

Well, there's another area in which we must be generous, and that is: Give generously of your time.

Look at 1 Corinthians 16, verses 5 and 6: *"After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you—for I will be going through Macedonia. Perhaps I will stay with you awhile, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go."*

Paul was extremely busy writing letters to churches and preaching at the church in Ephesus, but he wanted to spend some time with the Corinthians so he kind of tips them off

and says, “Hey, I might be coming by for a visit soon.” But he’s not just going to swing through and pick up their money and have it taken to Jerusalem, he wants to spend time with people. Maybe even stay the winter with them. It was important for him to spend time with them. His driving force is to spend time with the people of the church in Corinth and get a feel for what’s taking place. He wants to serve.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 16:7, *“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.”*

Paul was deeply invested in the lives of others. He showed it through his time.

Greg Nettle, a preacher in Massillon, Ohio, at the last North American Christian Convention Angela and I attended, shared the personal story of an individual who I think serves as a great example of someone one who excels in these very areas that the Apostle Paul is talking about – one who pours his heart into others. Greg Nettle said:

A few years ago, we were going through a very challenging transition time at the church I serve. You know how painful those times can be! It was one of those times that was a very dark night for me. Jeff Stone, who ministers at a church about two hours away, called me on the phone and asked me how I was doing. At the time I didn’t know Jeff all that well. We were only acquaintances. He had heard about our situation from my Children’s Director at a conference meeting. Jeff asked if he could drive up, take me to lunch, and pray with me. I was pretty floored. But the next day that’s exactly what he did. We ate lunch, I talked, he listened, and Jeff closed our time together by laying his hands on me and praying for me and for my ministry at Massillon.

I thanked him for taking a day to do this. And Jeff casually said, “Well, you would have done the same thing for me.”

It was gut check time. I was honest with him, and I said, “Jeff, I wouldn’t have driven two hours to pray with you.” (Then Greg said to the audience): “But friends...I will now. Because that’s the lesson God taught me that day. That’s part of what knowing Jesus does in your life. It gives you the security to not secretly smile when another church is going through a difficult time, but to embrace them and help them on the journey. But you have to know Jesus Christ and...Jeff Stone does.”

Colossians 4:5 reminds us: *“Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.”*

**So fill that in on your outline: Make the most of every opportunity.**

Paul wrote these things to a church that was facing incredible cultural obstacles. But in his mind...the greater the obstacles, the greater the opportunity. Make the most of every opportunity. Seek out ways that you can use your time to bless family and others around you.

Be on the lookout...be observant. You know, a gardener can spot a weed at twenty yards away. At times a police officer can sense a person who is nervous or guilty just by watching their body language.

My dad, when we were growing up and we'd be on vacation, had this sixth sense that he could always tell if we were within three miles of a Dairy Queen®! I'd see him and his hands would begin to tremble, and he would turn the car around, and we would say, "What's wrong, what's wrong? Are you ok?" And he'd say, "I think there's a Dairy Queen in this town somewhere," and sure enough he would find it.

That's the way I want it to be for Christians. Transfer that over. I want you to have your antenna up – not so much for ice cream – I want you have your antenna up for how you can invest for those in need. Look for some way you can help people out. And instead of just glossing over it, or when you say, "How are you?" you sense that they actually start to tell you the truth, that you pause and say, "OK, how can I get involved one layer deep in their life? What's the one thing I can do to show Christ to them today?" Paul somehow had eyes for that.

Fill your blanks in here: **"Remember that your time is not YOUR time any more than your money is YOUR money. It's God's time, God's money, and He can take both away tomorrow."**

### **III. GIVE GENEROUSLY OF YOUR HEART.**

**Then here's the final area that we need to focus on: Give generously of your heart.**

You can tell if a person truly has hidden their heart. When they hide their heart in this process...they are saying, "I love God's word; I love people; I love to invest in relationships; I have a heart for that!" While generosity in giving is important and generosity with our time is important, when we give generously of our heart in our love for people, that may be the greatest area of generosity. Jesus was always talking and sharing and healing and teaching people. And He recognized and called them by name because they were important to Him.

Look at the people Paul has poured out his heart into. Let's read 1 Corinthians 16:15-18: *"You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints. I urge you, brothers, to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it. I was glad when Stephanas,*

*Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you. For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition.”*

**I see three types of love that Paul expressed for these people in this passage.**

**The first is an affirming love.**

For many of us this is the most difficult. We don't say it out loud, but our inner voice seems to say, "Anything but affirmation." In other words, "I'll write a check, I might even go serve for an hour. But don't force me to \_\_\_\_\_ (and you fill in the blank)." "Don't force me to step out of my comfort zone and try out a Sunday school class or join a Bible Study or give a hug to someone who's hurting or make a meal for someone who is discouraged."

You know, after a worship service is over, I love to see people hanging around and talking to one another afterwards, just fellowshiping, or just sitting around connecting. Sometimes I'll walk back through the sanctuary 5 or 10 minutes after a service is over and I'll see someone sitting beside someone and they'll be quietly praying for them. They're investing themselves in individual lives and relationships.

**Then Paul goes on to model for us a tough love.**

You see, Paul has to feel betrayed in some ways. The church at Corinth had compromised and caved in just like the culture around it. So he had to write pretty matter-of-factly on some of these topics. This was no time to beat around the bush, the Corinthians needed a tough love from Paul—one that would motivate them to detest immorality rather than embrace it, to actively use their spiritual gifts rather than simply be a spectator, to genuinely love others instead of simply tolerating them.

**And then Paul describes a faithful love.**

Let me point something out, you can give generously of your time and your money and all the while it is entirely possible to just go through the motions. But is your heart in it? Are your actions motivated by a genuine priority of reaching others with the gospel? The apostle Paul invested in the lives of others for the long haul.

Most of us are so short sighted. We get a picture for what we hope life will be like in a year or a few years, but we seldom take a step back and think about life as a whole. But at the end of your life, you really won't care all that much about so many of the things that seem important to you right now. Those things will kind of fade into the woodwork and won't be nearly as important when you face death. At that point it won't matter whether your team won the game on Saturday or whether the stock market made you rich. You won't even care whether your business succeeded or not. What you will care about then is your relationship



with the Lord and your relationship with others. That's it. It all comes back to, how have you invested your time? Have you invested it in the lives of others?

Fill this in. I love this: **If your vision is for a year, plant wheat. If your vision is for a decade, plant trees. If your vision is for a lifetime, plant people (Chinese Proverb).**

You've got to get this, and understand this; more than anything else, you've got to invest in people; you've got to pour your life into others. Your generosity must overflow with them.

It's the teenager who, the night before Thanksgiving, calls just to ask if we know of any Soup Kitchens where she and her friends could serve the next day. It's the employee who has the guts to try and make some spiritual inroads with the CEO rather than just writing it off as a hopeless cause. It's the older Christian woman who takes an interest in mentoring young moms in the faith and looks for ways to share her faith. Invest in someone's life. Get close to them. Go beyond the shallow and the superficial.

Look at Paul's conclusion to this letter. Verses 23 and 24: *"The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen"* (vv. 23-24).

Paul concludes the same way he begins his letters; he starts with grace and love and he ends with grace and love because Paul knows that when this life is over what God will be measuring is our love for others and for Him. What we will desperately desire is His grace.

You say, "Well I can't change." But Paul was the least likely to love people like this. He had been a legalistic Pharisee "breathing out murderous threats" against the Christians. He oversaw the stoning of Stephen. He was much more concerned about his prestige and prominence and doing what he believed to be right than he was in loving people.

This is the one who has become affectionate, gracious, loving. So please don't ever say to me, "Well, it's just not my personality to be affectionate." Or "I'm just not wired that way." Or "I'm a black and white type person; I'm not a people person. So I don't show a lot of grace." I mean, if God can transform Paul, the author of this book, into a great lover of people, then He can certainly change your heart too. So, you be generous in your love of others. You give your heart.

In her autobiography, actress Helen Hayes wrote about the time that she cooked her first Thanksgiving turkey. She said to her family, "Hey, I've never done this before. So, before I bring the turkey out, let's decide right now that, if it's not good don't say a word...we'll just all get up from the table and go to a restaurant." She went back into the kitchen and when she brought the turkey out from the kitchen she found her husband, Charles (MacArthur) and son,



James, sitting at the dining room table with their coats and hats already on! Some gifts and talents come quite naturally, others take years of work and practice.

As you've listened and you've written down notes in these three areas – giving of your resources, time, and your heart...as Paul admonished the Corinthians, I'm certain that you've noticed that one or two of them come very naturally for you. But I think you'll find that *one* of these areas is a challenge for you. Which one of the three is the toughest for you?

I left some space on your note page so that you can jot down which of these three areas is an area where you could improve, since probably two of the three come more naturally for you. If you told your family and friends you were going to do better in one of these areas, which one would make them want to symbolically put on their coats and hats and head for the door because they wouldn't believe you could do it? What do you need to do in order to journey to deep? What's that next step of maturity that the Lord is laying before you?

The day after Thanksgiving is traditionally known as the busiest shopping day of the year. Many of you probably make your way to the stores on that day each year, looking for the bargain deals. It's the biggest day of the year, known as Black Friday. Maybe you recall the sad story that took place on Black Friday a couple of years ago. It happened at a Wal-Mart® store in Valley Stream, New York. People began lining up at 9:00pm on Thanksgiving evening. Video footage showed nearly 2,000 people crowded around waiting to come in the doors when they would open at 5 a.m. on Friday morning. But then tragedy struck as a temporary Wal-Mart® employee attempted to unlock the doors...he was trampled to death in a rush of thousands of early morning shoppers, police said.

The man was 34 and lived in Queens. Security personnel and police officers said that it was utter chaos as the doors were opened. Video footage showed as many as a dozen people knocked to the floor in the stampede of people trying to get into the store. The employee was "stepped on by hundreds of people" as other workers attempted to fight their way through the crowd to get to him. But the surge from the people behind was just too strong.

Now that is about as sad as it gets, but it is so indicative of our times—trampled to death by shoppers looking out for Number One. They were making the most of the opportunity alright, but it was completely selfish. The Bible tells us we need to have that kind of urgency and passion when it comes to giving our money, time, and heart to others...not for self.

Why is it that Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, is such a classic story? I think it's because you and I, like Ebenezer Scrooge, can get so caught up in the moment. And while no one may actually die as a result, in the process you may just run over the top of someone you love or run over the top of those who are right beside you or right in front of you. And some

may even be people that are a long ways away. But you realize at some point, “I can’t live like this. My life isn’t to be one of taking; my life needs to be one of giving.”

And we can’t change overnight, but the Holy Spirit can change us if we turn our life over to Him, repent of our sins, and allow Him to make that change. You see the challenge is simply this—for you to give generously your whole life to the One who gave so generously of His.