

Habits of the Holy (1 Corinthians 16)

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[0:00] Cool, so 1 Corinthians 16 at the very, very end. I'll be reading from NIV, so follow along. Now about the collection for the Lord'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 your income, saving it up so that when I come, no collections will have to be made.

Then when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gifts to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me.

After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you, for I will be going through Macedonia. 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.

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. But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost because a great door for effective work has opened to me and there are many who oppose me.

[1:06] 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. No one then should treat him with content.

Send him on his way in peace so that he may return to me. I am expecting him along with the brothers. 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 opportunity. Be on your guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous.

Be strong. Do everything in love. You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts to Acacia and they have devoted themselves to the service of the Lord's people.

I urge you, brothers and sisters, to submit to such people and to everyone who joins in the work and labors at it. I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Acacus arrived because they have supplied what was lacking for you.

[2:10] For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition. The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord and so does the church that meets at their house.

All the brothers and sisters here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss. I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. If anyone does not love the Lord, let that person be cursed. Come, Lord. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen. Keep that open in front of you because I'll be referring to it and there's a lot in there to sort of unpack and think about.

So you'll want to keep it open. But before we start to think about it, I'll pray for us. So let's pray. Father in heaven, we give you thanks for giving us your word.

We give you thanks for this wonderful book, this letter written by Paul that we can read and know of you, know your will, know your grace, know your glory, know your holiness.

[3:27] And I pray that as this church has thought about it and continues to think about it, that you will really use it to shape them into a people who reflect your splendor.

We pray that now as we think about this last chapter. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. When I was little, I was a big fan of Winnie the Pooh.

I don't know. Does anyone here know what Winnie the Pooh is? Is it still a thing? Is he still going? Well, we've got a kid. A kid who likes Winnie the Pooh. It's great. It was written by someone called A.A. Milne, and they wrote a bunch of poems for kids.

And they're quite funny. They're quite entertaining. They're a bit like ye olde English and use language that we don't really use at the moment. But I'd like to read you one that I remember from when I was like six or seven or something when I used to read Winnie the Pooh.

It goes like this. There once was an old sailor my grandfather knew who had so many things he wanted to do that whenever he thought it was time to begin, he couldn't because of the state he was in.

[4 : 41] He was shipwrecked and lived on an island for weeks, and he wanted a hat, and he wanted some breeks. He wanted some nets or a line and some hooks for turtles and things, which you read of in books.

And thinking of this, he remembered a thing which he wanted for water, and that was a spring. And he thought that to talk to, he'd look for and keep, if he found it, a goat or some chickens and sheep. And because of the weather, he wanted a hut with a door to come in by, which opened and shut, with a jerk, which was useful when snakes were about, and a very strong lock to keep savages out. So he thought of his hut, and he thought of his boat, and his hat, and his breeks, and his chickens and goat, and the hooks for his food, and the spring for his thirst.

But he could never think of which he ought to do first. So in the end, he did nothing at all, but basked in the shingle wrapped up in a shawl.

[5 : 43] And I think it was dreadful the way he behaved. He did nothing but basking until he was saved. I think that's a funny poem.

I think it's so funny. You hear about this guy who wants all these things and then does nothing. But it's not just funny. It resonates with me. And it probably resonates with some of you that sometimes you procrastinate for so long that you get nothing to do.

And often when you feel like you've got the most to do, that's when you feel like doing it the least.

And perhaps that's how we're feeling as we come to an end of a very full book.

If you just think back over all the topics that you've covered over the last few months, there's heaps going on in this book. This book has given you, and we went through it as a church this year as well, it's given us this lofty view of who God is and his glory and his vision for his church here on earth.

It's been wonderful, but it's been so full. And so many different things that we need to think about and consider and be faithful in.

[7 : 02] Doing what this book says, it's not like one of those assignments that you start like the night before and cram it in and get it done. This is a lifelong pursuit that we're embarking on.

Paul, the apostle, the writer, has called us to pursue holiness long term. Because these things are going to take a long time to work out.

I think the original hearers of this letter, the people in Corinth, the church in Corinth, would have been feeling this, but like times 10. This is a letter, it probably would have been read out as a whole in their church service.

So imagine hearing all these things over and over again just at you all at once. Even the most faithful believers would have been thinking, where on earth do we start with all this?

They've been called to a painful disciplinary process. Remember that way back in chapter five? Reimagining marriage and singleness, curbing selfish ministry appetites, silencing false teachers.

[8 : 09] It's going to take weeks. It's going to take months. It's going to take years. Holiness, the sanctification, which we spoke of way back in chapter one, it's a lifelong endeavor.

It takes a long time. But it does beg the question, where do we start? We don't just want to bask on the shingle wrapped up in a shawl.

We want to get out there and do something, begin somewhere. And I think this last chapter keys us into a few habits we could form today, things that we could start today, which will help us pursue holiness long term, which will help us continue to work out the things in this book long term.

Now, before I tell you what these things are, I'm going to warn you, none of you woke up this morning thinking, I want to hear about these three topics. They're a little bit awkward. They're a little bit painful.

They cut close to the bone. And my only thing I can say is that they're as awkward to talk about as they are to hear about. So we'll all suffer together. The three areas that Paul wants us to target in terms of our habits are our money, the people who minister to us, and our mentors.

[9 : 31] So our money, our ministers, and our mentors. That's what we're going to talk about. So first, whoop, money. I've pushed it over.

No, I've got it back. Our money. There's some situation, we read of it in the first four verses there. There's a situation back in another city, Jerusalem.

Christians there need support, need financial support. Maybe there's a famine. Those things happened back in the day. Maybe they're doing something cool, like building a new church building, or something like that.

Whatever the situation is, Paul is calling this church to give to this cause of the Jerusalem church. And now we've all been in this situation, probably, haven't we?

Where someone is asking you to give money to a charitable cause. And we all know what to do. We all know what the people do, is that they pull on your heartstrings.

[10:26] They get at you through your emotions. Someone knocked on my door recently, and I opened it, and the first thing they asked was, do you care about animals? How on earth do you answer that thing?

I know immediately that they want my money, but how do I say, no, I don't care about your animal cause? That's how you ask for money. You sort of emotionally manipulate people, and churches can be the same.

But notice what Paul does. It's different. I'm going to read verse 2. I'm reading in the ESV, but don't let that worry you. Verse 2 says, On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up as he may prosper so that there will be no collecting when I come.

Paul's way of getting money is like the opposite way that most people we might have encountered do it. He's not interested in coming and getting them all excited and showing them pictures of orphans in Jerusalem or whatever it is.

He wants them to collect up weekly, monthly, whatever it is, so that when he comes, he doesn't have to do anything. It's just there. That's what he wants us to do.

[11:44] And he gives a couple of principles, I think, that guides how we use our money, how we give our money. First, he says, give as a priority, not a percentage.

He says, on the first day of the week or maybe the day you get paid, put some aside to the extent which God has prospered you to like within the bounds of what you earn.

And note what he's not saying. If you've been going to church for some time, you'll have heard of this 10%, right? Give 10%. It's an Old Testament thing. In the Old Testament, the people of Israel were called to give a tenth of everything.

That's the tithe. Paul knows the Old Testament. He knows it better than you or I. And yet, he doesn't call this church, he doesn't say, look, just give 10%. It may be a good guide, but he doesn't say that. He says, rather, give us a priority. Make it the first thing that you do with your money when you get it. Give in a way that shows that the work of the Lord, the ministry of the Lord, what God is doing in our world is a priority for you.

[12:56] The way you live. Secondly, he says, our giving should be planned, not panicked. We're not whipping people up into a frenzy. Weekly, monthly, whatever it is, planning, saving it up in a regular way.

Paul doesn't want to come and give some heartfelt appeal. He wants it to be there waiting. And so he says, plan to give. Make it something that's, you know, in your diary or however you plan your life.

Giving to the work of the Lord, our money should be a prioritized, planned thing that we do. A consistent, determined action which we take for the Lord.

Week after week, month after month, year after year. Now the question is, I said at the beginning, this stuff is going to help us be holy, be godly, follow the book.

How on earth does me giving my money away help me follow Jesus? Well I think, well I don't think, I know it was Jesus himself who said, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

[14:11] We tend to think, or at least I tend to read that and think, I must be treasuring the wrong things, I'll change what I treasure. But you can actually read it the other way. He's saying, where you put your treasure, where you put your money, that's where your heart will go.

If someone is consistently and determinedly giving their money to the work of the Lord, inevitably they'll care about that work of the Lord.

If you're living in Corinth way back then and you give money to the Jerusalem church, you'll want to know how they're going further on down the track. Where your money goes, so often your heart follows.

Now, I have no idea what habits you're in, what your incomes are, what, you know, what your situation is. So all I'll say is, whatever you could do, even if it's tiny and seems insignificant, get in

the habit of giving now.

it doesn't get easier to give away your money. You don't see lots of billionaires just throwing money away. It never gets easier to give away your money.

[15 : 23] So whatever you have now, make a habit of giving your money to the work of the Lord. the second area Paul speaks is ministers.

Ministers of the gospel, people who are engaged in preaching and teaching the word full time. We see this in verses 5 down to verse 12.

And when you first read them, you kind of, I mean, maybe they're interesting to you, you know how Paul's moving around the place, but they're just, I think, seems like there's nothing in there, doesn't it?

But I don't think this is just sort of information that's sort of historically interesting because we know where Paul was going. I think this is meant to be formative, forming us as believers as well as informative and I'll show you why.

Look with me, verse 7, Paul says, I hope to spend some time with you if the Lord permits. And so what he's saying is that I'm not just kind of dropping in for some tea and then leaving or staying for lunch and then leaving.

[16 : 30] No, I want to spend good quality time with you, teaching you, talking to you. But on top of that, you'll notice he says he's not coming quite yet because he's in Ephesus and there's some really good ministry opportunities going on there.

A door's open to him in Ephesus. And so you put it together, Paul's saying, look, I've got a really fruitful ministry happening where I am, but I'm going to leave that because I want to spend some time with you.

I need to spend time with you. Why does Paul tell them this? Well, I can't help but think the purpose of this information is to tell the Corinthian church, get ready, I'm coming to see you.

We've just talked about all these issues going on in your church and I'm coming and staying. You'll remember, maybe you don't, maybe it was just my mum, but if any of you have had this, you'll know what I mean.

Sometimes your mum will say, you wait till your father gets home. It freaks you out, doesn't it? You're like, oh, I better clean myself, get my act together. Paul's telling him something like that.

[17 : 54] He's saying, I'm coming and I'm expecting a response from you. I'm expecting you to have applied Jesus' life and death and resurrection to your lives and to your situation. I'm expecting some sort of change from you.

I'm expecting repentance. I'm expecting you to be ready to receive the ministry of the word. And so I take it a good place to start pursuing holiness.

A good habit to form today is to be ready to receive the ministry of the word. Adopt a stance that's open to the preaching of the gospel, that's ready to listen.

Now if you're still not seeing that, Paul, gives us more on top of that, he talks about Timothy's travel plans. And Timothy is coming to see them as well and he tells them, don't make him afraid.

Make his life easy, comfortable. Be ready to receive Timothy as well because he's going to minister the word to you also. And I wonder in verse 12 there where he talked about our brother Apollos who doesn't want to come.

[19 : 09] He has absolutely no desire to come. I wonder if he spoke to Apollos and Apollos didn't want to come because he's heard that his ministry, his preaching has been used in the Corinthian church to cause division.

That actually he wasn't listened to. Actually, they weren't ready to hear the word of the Lord as he preached it. They really just used his ministry to stir up more trouble in their church and saying, no, I'm not coming just yet.

Whatever Apollos's reasons are, the point is that if we want to pursue holiness, we need to be people who are easy to do ministry with.

Doesn't mean you have to take everything I'm saying as the gospel and never disagree, free, but we need to be people who are willing to hear the word, eager to hear the word explained, and it's something we have to do consciously because I don't think any of us do it consciously.

I've heard preachers preach really deep and heartfelt and thoughtful sermons where they've really got to the core of the text and told the congregation about Jesus.

[20 : 29] And when we come out, having tea or coffee afterwards, you talk to someone like, oh, it was a bit boring or it went a bit long, I didn't get his illustration. People whose hearts were closed to the ministry of the word.

In some ways, maybe he'll listen to this later so I'd better watch out, but I'm kind of glad that William's not here because it might be awkward for him to hear, but we need to realise that he has been put here to minister the word by God.

He's not going to make every decision, he's not going to make the best decision every time, not everything he says will sort of strike you down. You might have questions, you might need to talk things through, but the reality is that his ministry, the determining factor is not how many hours he puts into ministry, not how wonderful and eloquent he is as a preacher, the most important thing for his ministry is how you receive it.

The most important thing for him to see the work of the Lord happening here is how you receive him as a minister of God's word. So I'd encourage you to become ready to hear God's word.

Come ready to receive what God is speaking through William, through his word, come ready to maybe re-evaluate your own life, your own choices, where you're going.

[22 : 04] The alternative is you can turn up and scroll Instagram and not listen and everybody will be miserable, but if we want to be churches where God's glory shines, we're going to need to receive the ministry of the people God has put among us.

So there's money, there's ministry, finally, mentors. By that I mean the people who guide you, the people you look to as an example, who you listen to, who show you the way here as a fellowship. Whether consciously or unconsciously, we all have people that we copy. When my wife and I talk about how to do things as parents, what we're going to do, what we first do is say, what did your parents do in this situation?

And then I'll say, what did my parents do in this situation? Because by default we just do what our parents did for us, whether it's good or bad. We never think about it, we think it's normal.

And then when I talk with my wife about what her parents did, I think, oh, maybe my parents were the weird ones. I don't know. But if we don't talk about it, we'll just copy them. I'm sure for you here, when you go about doing different ministries here as a church, you may not have thought about how you're doing every single bit.

[23 : 25] You just do the same thing that the person who did it before you did. And copying someone is perfectly fine. It's actually a really good thing to do, provided you're copying someone worthy of imitation.

and Paul knows this. And so in verses 13 and 14, he gives them a list of things he wants them to be. He wants them to be faithful, strong, brave, loving one another.

And rather than sort of expounding each one of those different characteristics, he points to this random guy and a few random guys who have difficult names to pronounce.

He points to this guy called Stephanas and his household and he says recognize people like this guy. He's saying here's someone to copy.

Here's someone to imitate. Live a bit like him. Let him be your mentor. Now, here's the catch.

[24 : 32] Maybe the application is be like Stephanas, right? But who was this guy? We only know a tiny bit about him here. He was apparently one of the founding members of the church, blah, blah, blah.

We don't really know much about him. Not enough for us to imitate him. But Paul says there are others like him. There are others who are fellow workers with this guy, with Paul, who are doing the work of the Lord, who we should imitate, who we should follow.

Other people here who could be our examples. I suspect if Paul was writing his letter to this church, he wouldn't have said be like Stephanas. He would have pointed to some people here and said be like them.

Copy them. Recognize them. And so I take it a good thing for us would be to have, be consciously thinking about who am I copying?

Whose example am I following? Who is my mentor? I think there's two sort of diagnostic questions that you might ask and you might think about as you go.

[25 : 45] First, whose example am I following? Whose by default, before I've even thought about it, what kind of thing am I doing? Who am I copying before I've thought about it?

Second question, whose example should I be following? Are there people, obviously Jesus, yeah, that's the answer, but are there people here at church who live with bravery and faith and love and service who seem like good examples who I can maybe get to know, get to and be friend and become like, who I can follow and imitate?

Whose example am I following before I've thought about it and whose example should I follow? 1 Corinthians is a big book, there's a lot in it, where do we start?

Well I think Paul is giving us three really concrete places to start, our money, our ministers and our mentors. Get our bank accounts in order, get our bank accounts prioritizing the Lord, be easy to teach and follow the right people.

We don't want to bask on the shingle, wrap it up in the shawl, we don't want to do nothing at all, we want to get to work, living out the gospel as we have seen it in this book.

[27 : 17] And these are three good places for us to start, but it's not quite the end. You'll notice there that there's the final greeting, every sort of man and his dog is saying, is sending their greeting to this church, a list of people who love this church, churches in Asia and the couple Aquila and Priscilla, all the brothers, Paul himself.

And we read it and think, oh that's nice, and then finish the book. But I think there's more going on. I think Paul is reminding them that there's a bunch of churches out there in the world who love them, a bunch of churches out there who are rooting for them, who believe in them and want to see them become the glorious picture of their saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And he's reminding them of that, to remind them that they don't stand alone. They're not pursuing Jesus by themselves. They're not pursuing Jesus as a church by themselves.

There's people all over the world, or there's people all over New Zealand, there's people everywhere pursuing Jesus, bowing the knee to him, seeking to live out what he has told us.

And there's a good reason why Paul draws our attention to that here at the end. I think he knows that what he's calling us to is hard.

[28 : 50] It's not easy to go out and deny yourself and love people and do all these different things that he's been talking about. And even today, you might have been thinking, really?

God's going to take my money? I have to listen to him? What's going on? It takes real determination and commitment and strength and faithfulness to grow and to keep walking in this direction.

Like I was saying before, when I think about the church where I'm pastor, PBC, if you take any individual week and ask me about it, I'll probably scratch my head and say, oh, things didn't go exactly as how I'd wanted it to.

But if you take the years, you actually see people growing in the Lord. But in the midst of that, it's easy to become discouraged.

Or maybe, if you do well, it's easy to become self-righteous and think you're smashing it for Jesus. When you're focusing on just your local church, it's easy to get discouraged, it's easy to get misled, it's easy to sort of get off the beaten track.

[29 : 59] And so Paul, in a sense, here at the end, he pinches the screen, he zooms out and shows us the whole world, what God is doing in the whole world. He's saying, look at all these churches who know about you, who believe the same thing as you, who talk about the same stuff as you, who are pursuing the same goal as you.

Jesus is working all over this world, all over this. Back then it was the Roman Empire who was against it. And that tells us that this Jesus that we're living for, he's powerful.

He's gloriously powerful and it doesn't matter what nation or city we're in, he's going to be at work there, not just in us but in many churches there.

There's a group of ladies back at Papakura Baptist. Several years ago they started up an op shop, they were selling all our second hand stuff to people and the money that they raise goes to support mission and training.

So over the years I've quietly raised thousands of dollars for mission and training. Now I wonder who you think the beneficiaries of all their many days and weeks and hours of hard work are.

[31 : 19] I can tell you there's this church that meets at about 4.30pm on a Sunday in Pakaranga, it's you. I know you're the beneficiaries because I, they helped me get through college and they helped William get through college with the money that they raised.

And the thing is you could run straight into them with your shopping trolley at the supermarket and you wouldn't know who they are, you wouldn't know what they've done, and yet in a funny sense

they've sent their greeting, they've sent their love because Jesus has worked through them to raise up gospel workers.

It's not because they've been so ingenious and so this kind of thing, it's evidence that Jesus is powerful and that he's at work and that as we follow him he can do incredible things, more than we ever thought possible in us.

It's evidence that through our faithfulness and our love, Jesus can change us, he can change our church and he can change our city, he can change our country and he can change our world.

Jesus' redeeming power will enable us to live for God's glory starting today. As we end this book, I'd like to take you back to the very first chapter, opening verses.

[32 : 57] I'll make a small change but I'm sure you'll forgive me when you'll hear it. They'll say, to the church of God, that is PCBC English, those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's pray. Gracious Father, we thank you so much for the work that you're doing here, how you're redeeming us transforming us, lavishing us with your grace.

We thank you for the work that you're doing all over Auckland and so many different churches who are seeking to live for you, seeking to proclaim your glorious gospel to the world.

And I pray you'd strengthen us and empower us to continue to pursue you with strength, with bravery, and with love. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen.