

## MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: 1 Corinthians

Last Words

1 Corinthians 16:5-24

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 11.05-06.11.11

We are back in the book of I Corinthians and, actually, this is the last Sunday that we will be in this particular study. It has been a little over a year since we first started our study and now we are closing this out with the final words to the Corinthian church by the Apostle Paul. Some of you might be ahead of me and you might be thinking, what happened to chapter 15? We were in chapter 14 and are we jumping right over... No, actually, we are going to come back to chapter 15. It is all about the resurrection of Jesus Christ and so I am going to use that the month prior to Easter to prepare our own hearts and our own minds in preparation for our own celebration of Easter so we'll get there. But I did not want to completely postpone our study and so we are in chapter 16. Wendell caught the first few verses last week and now we are in verse 5. But I want you to just start with a little bit of warning because when you come to an end of a book and you look at it and you see that it is basically the final greeting, the final instructions, maybe some travel plans of the author, you might be tempted to think, well, what is really much here for me to learn. We need to be careful of that because many times the final words, the last words, are some of the most essential words of the book or of a letter. Think about the final words of Jesus Christ. What were they? They were the Great Commission for us to go. Think of the last words of the Apostle Peter in II Peter. He was telling the dispersion, those Christians who were suffering persecution to be holy, to be submissive, for themselves to press forward. Think about the last words of John in the Book of Revelation or III John. Think about the last words of Paul to Timothy right before Paul's life himself was going...he was going to bring under persecution; his own life was going to come to an end. He is giving the last words to Timothy passing the baton on to carry the faith forward. And now we see really the last words we would think to be the last words to this church at Corinth. We now know that there were other words because we have another book called II Corinthians but for as much as Paul understood these were going to be some of the last words that he was going to pen to this church in Corinth. And we can see a little bit about the Apostle Paul and about his heart in these final words and we see the emphasis that he wants to leave these people that he now has raised in the faith.

We are going to begin—to pick up in verse 5 and read just a bit. Then we are going to stop and back up. Let's begin together in verse 5. I will read. You listen and follow along in your Bibles. He says, "I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I intend to pass through Macedonia, and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may help me on my journey, wherever I go." Now already he is preparing them that he is going to stop back; that is his desire. For I do not want to see you now just in passing, I hope to spend some time with you if the Lord permits. "But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost"—that is where he is writing this letter from. ... "for a wide door for effective work is open to me and there are many adversaries. "When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am. So let no one despise him. Help him on his way in peace, that he may return to me, for I am expecting him with the brothers. Now concerning our brother Apollos"...you remember Apollos, I read about him earlier in the letter... "Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to visit you with the other brothers, but it was not at all his will to come now. He will come when he has opportunity. Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love." Now stop right there for a moment.

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Most of the information that you have read thus far are travel plans and some final admonishments of the Apostle Paul. You might be scratching your head and you are thinking, well, I am waiting. Where are those pertinent last words that I need to infuse into my life? Well, I think they are there. I think they are clearly in the text. For one thing, what we get an opportunity to do is to peer into the life of the Apostle Paul as a leader. We get to look at his leadership DNA. And before we get to what I think is the heart of the passage, I just want to back up and I do not want you to miss what already is a great treasure of learning. I know that there are many of us who are leaders in our communities, leaders of organizations and industry. You are leaders in non-profit, charitable organizations. Many of you are leaders here in this church—house church pastors, leaders of small groups, leaders of ministry. And leadership is an important aspect of your life.

I think we can learn about leadership through the leadership of the Apostle Paul in this text. Notice right off the bat what type of leader he was. He was visionary leader. We see that in verse 5. What does he say? He says to the church, I will visit you after passing through Macedonia. Now, you say, what is the big deal about that? The big deal is that he was just in Macedonia. He just came from Corinth which is just below Macedonia, sailed over to Ephesus. In fact, let me just help you set this in context. I am going to bring up a map. He was in Corinth. Corinth was where he spent a significant amount of time planting this church, raising up leaders. This is the church he had been writing to but he left Corinth and he sails over to Ephesus for a period of time. He is expecting actually to spend until Pentecost there, maybe even the winter. And he is just writing a letter back to the Corinthian church saying I am going to come back. I am going to come back and I am going to go into Macedonia. Actually the Spirit of God had a little bit of a different plan for him and sent him on down to Caesarea. There he reformulated a plan and went on to a third missionary journey. But his plan was originally to launch out of Ephesus back to Corinth and then ultimately into Macedonia. If you see from the map, he had already been along the ridge of Macedonia planting a number churches. This is what I think was going through the mind of the Apostle Paul. I think he was thinking I am going back to Macedonia and now I am going inland with the Gospel. Part of this comes from a burning sense of calling in his own life. Out of the Book of Acts, Acts, chapter 16, he had a vision. It is called the Vision of the Man from Macedonia where he sees this man calling him to take the gospel into Macedonia. And you see all throughout the Apostle's career his desire to go back to Macedonia and preach the gospel. I think that is what he is thinking. In fact, you read in Romans, chapter 9 that he ultimately wanted to go to Spain with the Gospel. How do you get to Spain? You get to Spain through Macedonia. So this was his mindset. This was his vision. You say, but his plans changed. Yes, his plans changed but he had a plan to change, that is the point. He was always one or two steps ahead of everybody else and this is where his mindset was. You can see that in the scriptures.

I often tell our leaders around here, the speed of the leader, the speed of the team. You always have to be a few steps ahead of the team and, I think that is what Paul exemplifies here. He had a vision to go into Macedonia. He was a visionary.

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Not only was he a visionary, he was adaptable to the Lord's timing. And that is an important aspect of leadership. Many times as leaders, we get in this rut of thinking it has got to be our way and on our timetable. But Paul teaches us that we can be adaptable. Look just quickly at verses 6 and following. He says: Perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter whatever the Lord wills. He was open to plans being changed. Now why is that important to us? I tell you because we fall into this rut of thinking on a future type of scale as if tomorrow is completely governed by our decisions. In fact, James gives a great little parable about this. In the Book of James, he talks about a businessman and he says the businessman thinks in his mind this way. Well, tomorrow, I am going to this city or that city and I am going to sell this or I am going to sell that...I am going to do this. But then James says, but you really do not know what tomorrow will bring so what you should do is to start everyday with this mindset or concept. You ought to be saying, "if the Lord will." Paul again exemplifies this. He models this as a leader. He had a vision. He had a desire but he was submissive to the Lord's plan and clearly the Lord had other plans for him than going back to Corinth and travelling into Macedonia.

The third thing I think we see in the text is that Paul is a planner; that even though he is a visionary, even though he is adaptable, he is still a planner. He is strategic. Look at verses 7 and 8. He says, "For I do not want to see you now just in passing, I hope to spend time with you, if the Lord permits. But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost..." He had made plans even though he knew those plans may change, he still had plans. Now what is it that we can learn? Listen, we all follow somebody. Whether you are a leader or not, we all are in that role of follower. And this tells us something in that you never follow someone who has a dream without direction. You are always looking to follow someone who has a strategic bent who is going to have a plan in place. Now they might be adaptable...that is what Paul teaches us. But they still have a desire to plan out a course. If you are a leader, one of the things that we can learn from the Apostle Paul, yes, there is a visionary element to what we are called to be. Yes, we are called to be adaptable. But at the same time, we are called to be careful and critical in our strategic plans to move forward. Why? Because we never know if the Lord is going to change our plans or use our plans and that is the point. And so, we should be ready.

Also, one of the things that Paul teaches us is that we have to be realists in the reality of what we are doing. We have to be realists to the cause and that is what he says in verse 9. In essence, he says, "...for a wide door for effective work is open to me." He said I am very excited about that but here is the realism. He says but I know "there are many adversaries".

Now let me just talk to those of you who are leaders within the church context for a moment. And I know that there are many of you, those of you who are in our house churches or in our small groups or in our missions or in our worship ministry or in any of the number of ministries that we have here from nursery through children on up—there are leaders here. You are in a spiritual environment. You need to understand that. And when you bring your leadership abilities that God has given you into a spiritual

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environment, you need to learn from the Apostle Paul the realism that there will be conflict in your life and in your leadership. You cannot escape that. There will be conflict because you are involved in a spiritual endeavor. One of my favorite authors, G. Campbell Morgan, who was a pastor from the previous century writes, “If you have no opposition in the place you serve, you are serving in the wrong place.” “If you have no opposition in where you are serving, you are serving in the wrong place”...because if you are a spiritual leader, you need to expect conflict. And let me just tell you, Ephesians, chapter 6, verse 12, says it clear, “We do not fight against flesh and blood.” What do we fight against? We fight against rulers, against authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” That is who we fight against. And so, listen, leaders. You ought to expect trouble in your life. You ought to expect trouble in your ministries. You ought to expect hardship whether that be spiritual, mental, physical, whatever. You are a person in leadership, you ought to expect conflict. That is just being real and Paul teaches us that.

But now look at verses 10 and 12, what next do we see about Paul and his leadership? You see two names there in the text, Timothy and Apollos. Who were they? These were people who were under the ministry of the Apostle Paul being trained to be future leaders. So what is Paul? Paul is a trainer. Paul did not just do the ministry himself. What Paul did was that he was training others around him to take the ministry forward. We understand that as “a Timothy”. We often use that phrase. In fact, I talked to our house church pastors about developing “Timothy’s” in their lives. I am going to talk a little bit more about house churches next week but let me just tell you about some exciting things going on. We trained the first set of house church pastors. We called them our alpha group. They were our first group. We sent them out. They planted five house churches. You know about that; you have heard about that. What you might not realize, a couple of months ago, we started training eight more men to plant additional house churches. Three of those eight men came from our first set of house churches—from our first house church leaders. They were the “Timothy’s”; they are the “Timothy’s” of these first house churches. And so these men gravitated to the idea that they need to find young men around them so that they might pass the baton to them. But now, listen, this is not just for pastors.

This is not just for leaders. This goes across the board to anyone who calls himself a Christ-follower. Do you realize that is your call in your life? Is to pass the baton. It has been going on since Jesus. Jesus taught the disciples; the disciples taught those all the way down the line until you, right at this particular point. Someone taught you. Now you cannot be the end of the process. Someone taught me; now I am teaching you. Now you are supposed to go out and teach others. You say, where do you get this? Well, Paul tells Timothy, II Timothy, chapter 2, verse 2, he says, “Go out and find faithful men so that you can teach others also.” And what are those faithful men to do? They are to go out and teach others also. You see, that is what you are to do. If you are the end of the process, you failed. Do you understand that? You have got to pass the baton on. You say, yeh, but I do not know what to teach. That is OK; find someone who knows less than you and teach them everything you know. I mean, that is how it works. Then go find someone who knows more and set under their teaching. You know, keep the process going!

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Paul, again, just what a great leader! He exemplifies this concept of training other people. Why? I mean that is why he uses the motif of a race. He uses that illustration over and over again. It is the idea that I am in a race and I am going to pass the baton. I have the baton now but I am putting it in your hands and there is a day when I am going to let go. There is a day when I am no longer going to be here and now your hand will grip hold fast to that baton and get ready to place it into somebody else's and that is your role—to take that baton and move the Gospel forward.

But I think the thing that exemplifies Paul's leadership is this last aspect, that he is a teacher—he is a teacher. And he is going to teach the Corinthians as if it was the last time that he is writing to them in verses 13 and 14. In fact, I would say that this is the heart of chapter 16. You say, how do you know that? Well, it is because in these two verses, there are five imperatives—five commands back to back to back. This is what the Apostle Paul wanted the church at Corinth to know. I want you to think of it this way. Instead of thinking this is a letter from the Apostle Paul from Ephesus to the Corinthian church, I want you to think of it like this. That Paul, if he was there in Corinth, that this would have been his last message to them before he left. I think he would have said these exact same things to the church so that they would have had in mind what it was that they should now move forward on in their Christian life—that these are the five essentials, five commands, five imperatives that they were to build into their own personal lives.

Look at them. Verses 13 and 14, he says this, “Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong and in all that you do be done in love.” Five commands; now let's learn them. First one, he says, be watchful. I think the better term to understand the meaning of this word is to be alert. Be alert is what Paul is saying. The word, watchful, literally has the sense that we are to refrain from sleep, that you are to stay awake. So I think the sense of what Paul is saying to the churches is you need to be alert, not just be watchful but be awake, be alert. Be alert to what is the question. Be alert to what? What am I going to be alert for in my life? Well, thankfully, this word is used twenty-two other times throughout the New Testament. So if you want to answer the question, to be alert for what. All you have to do is follow the alerts through Scripture and you get a sense. For example, Scripture says to be alert against Satan, against our adversary because our adversary, the devil, prowls around looking for someone to devour. We ought to be alert against our adversary. We ought to be alert against temptation in our life. We ought to understand those areas of our lives that we can easily fall to. Now it does not take long following Christ to figure that out that there are certain areas in your life that you seem to be drawn towards, to be tempted. You know, that is one of things of being wise in the Lord is to understand just what your propensities are and then steer away from those.

We are to be alert against false teachers. I cannot say enough about this. You should be alert to false teaching in your life. That means, you need to understand the Word to understand when the Word is taught falsely. The problem is so many times people will just believe anyone who stands before them with an open Bible in their hands. Listen, everybody who stands before you with a Bible in their hands

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does not necessarily have the intentions of teaching you the truth and you need to understand that. And it does not really matter how many people they are teaching. I was having a conversation with a man just this last week and we were talking about this. And he said something about one particular person, he says, he cannot be a false teacher. He has twenty thousand people who come and listen to him every weekend. I said, listen, it really does not matter how many people come to listen to a person, it does not make that person right. The Word is what judges a person. I often tell you if you have been around here for any length of time, you know this, you ought to be careful about even things I say. You ought to be judging the things I say. You ought to be judging the things I say. Why? Because the Scripture calls us to be alert. Be alert especially to false teachers.

Now on a positive sense, what else does it say? We ought to be alert in prayer. We ought to be vigilant in our prayers. We also ought to be alert for the Lord's return, waiting anxiously for the return of the Lord. So what is the idea here? The idea is that this is not a time of resting. I think that is what Paul is saying to the Corinthian church. He is saying this is a time for spiritual vigilance. Why? Well, why? Because so much tries to steal our focus from Christ, that's why. Why does Paul tell the Corinthians to be alert? Well, very simply, he tells them to be alert because they were not being alert. You have studied the book with me. I mean, these last fifteen, sixteen chapters, what have learned? Over and over again, the Corinthians allowed their past life to creep into their new life and they were not being alert to that. I mean, just think back through what you have learned. Chapter one, they were substituting human wisdom for God's wisdom. They were not being alert. Chapters two and three, they were backbiting and being argumentative. Chapter five, they were being immoral. Chapter six, they were lawsuit happy; they were suing each other left and right. Chapter seven, they were perverting marriage, perverting divorce, perverting singleness. Chapter ten, they were self-indulgent. Chapter twelve through fourteen, they were misusing, misapplying the spiritual gifts. They were not being alert and what does the Apostle Paul say to them. The last command on his way out, what does he say? He says, Corinthians, watch; be watchful of your spiritual life. The same thing could be said to us today. Be alert to where you are at following Christ because it is, oh, so easy just to kind of level out, hit a plateau. And once you hit a plateau, the only two directions are—you are either going to break out of that plateau and grow up or you are going to go into decline. We see that in the church at Corinth. We see it in our own lives and so what does Paul say? Be vigilant, be alert.

Not only be alert, but he says to stand firm. See it in the text. Stand firm. Stand firm, how? Well, he tells us. Look at it. It says, "Stand firm in the faith." What does he mean by faith? There are two options. He could be saying stand firm in the faith of trusting like the idea of salvation or stand firm in the faith of truth. Which one is it? Well, I think it is the latter. You say, how do you know that? Because of the context. These people already claim to be saved; they already claim to have salvation. And so what does Paul say? Now live out that salvation; live out the truth of that salvation. He says, do it this way—stand firm. Staccato. It is the idea of continuous. Now are you picking up a vibe of the Apostle Paul? He is already saying, you need to be fervent, be alert, now he is saying continue. Stand firm, how?

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Look at the text. Stand firm “in”. That little word, “in” is the clue—in the faith of truth. In other words, be active in your faith. Be active in your faith. Be active in a continuation of infusing the Word of God in your life. Do you realize that when you stop infusing the Word of God in your life, you are opening up yourself to plateauing and decline in your spiritual life.

You ought to be active in and diligent in prayer in your life. One of the beautiful things about prayer—prayer for the believer, it is like breathing, it is just natural. We get up in the morning and start a conversation with God. We start going through our morning routine, get in the car and drive to work having a conversation with God. Going through the day talking with God. You need to start to think about prayer as a conversation of a relationship that you are in; not just this momentary, one-time, small amount of time that you do it and then you get up and you go on with the rest of your life. One of the sad realities of Cambodia is that it is a country locked in bondage under Buddhism. And unfortunately, the American media and Hollywood has glamorized the religion of Buddhism as if it was this aesthetic way of life that is filled with peace and happiness and you spend time in meditation and ultimately you arrive in nirvana. But the reality is that it is a dark, dark religion. You see all these people, all these shaved-head monks in orange robes all over the country. You see all of these temples all over and they are actually places of great darkness, not great light.

I was at a couple of monasteries and I had the opportunity to talk with a couple of monks on one occasion and actually one of the monks, he and I got into a conversation about spiritual things. And I was asking him, well, how is it that you connect with the divine in your life. And he went on this conversation with me about all the things that he must do. And they really centered in meditation—the things that he must do that leads to meditation that frees him from the corruption of not only his own soul but the world around him. He says that if you spend enough time doing this, then ultimately you can reach the divine—you do reach nirvana. And that is why I asked him, well, how is it that you mediate and he could not answer that question. I said, can you teach me how to mediate. He said, oh no, I could not do that. He says that it is something you must experience yourself. He said it is a journey you must try. Here was a spiritual leader of the country that even the king would bow down to and he does not have answers that grip the human soul. He does not have answers of how do we have a connection with the spiritual divine. And so I started this conversation. I said, in Christianity, it is based on a relationship of not something I must do to achieve a standing with God but it is something that has already been done for me through the person of Jesus Christ. And now when I spend time in the Word or spend time in prayer, it is not something I must do to reach an end, it is something I want to do because it is part of the relationship that was cultivated by what God has already done in Christ. Do you realize the difference there? And so when we say we are a people of faith, Paul says, stand firm in that faith; be active in that faith. I am running out of time so I need to keep moving.

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But look in the middle of verse 13, what does he say? I love this phrase. He says, “So Corinthians, be watchful, stand firm, act like men.” Now for some of you, you might be looking at this and you saying, “That is kind of a sexist statement.” And to the Apostle Paul, that is not very fair. Well, you actually have to give him some liberty because this is a word that is only used once in Scripture. And if it was only used once in history, we really would not know how to translate it but fortunately this word is used many other times in ancient Greek literature. And the translators got it right. It means “act like men.” In other words, it is the idea of behave with wisdom, behave with courage but the real meaning behind it is the idea of being courageous. I think that is what Paul is saying here. He is not saying to physically act like men but be courageous like brave men, men of wisdom, men of courage who are entering into battle. The way this word is used in ancient literature is the idea of don’t be a coward but be courageous. Be courageous with what? With the Gospel. That is what he is saying. Here is Corinth surrounded by this pagan city and this pagan influence that was influencing even the church. And what is Paul fighting against? Paul is fighting against the infusion of this paganism. He is basically saying, stand up; be courageous with the Gospel. It is the same thing that he says in Romans. Romans, chapter 1, he says, “For I am not ashamed of...” ashamed of what? ... “the Gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.” He says, be courageous. Don’t back down. Don’t be embarrassed that you name the name of Christ. Do you realize that? That as Christ followers, that defines who you are. The Gospel now defines you. Your favorite football team does not define you. The color of your skin does not define you. Your social standing does not define you. Your job does not define you. Do you know what defines you? Jesus Christ now defines you. The Gospel of God defines you so do not back down. Be courageous with that.

Do you know how this plays out? Let me just tell you. I will give you a little scenario of how this plays out. Imagine you are with a group of people and they want to go and they want to involve themselves...do something and you just don’t feel right about it. There is just something in your spirit that says, ah, I don’t know if I really want to be a part of that. Listen, you have two choices at that point. You can ignore that inner feeling and you can just go along with it and it might lead you to some place that just does not bring glory to Christ or opportunity for the Gospel in your life. And you might ignore that to a point where it allows you to be involved in a lifestyle that you otherwise would not be involved with and know that it does not glorify Christ. Or the second opportunity is for you to gently say to your friends, “You know what? There is something about that does not feel right for me as a follower of Jesus Christ.” Now you do not have to beat your faith over their head and make them feel guilty. You can just say, you know what? That is fine for you but don’t take this wrong but for me, I really do not want to involve myself in that. That is being courageous with the Gospel. It is living out your faith. Now I guess you could have a third option. You could just lie to them and you could say, “No, I am not in the mood and just go on home.” But you know what happens? You miss the opportunity of the Gospel because if you tell them the truth of why you do not want to involve yourself, it opens up a door and just possibly one of your friends might at one point in their journey come to you and say, why is it? What is it about your life that you choose to do this rather than that or why is it that you have such a peace? You have

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opportunity then to share the Gospel. What does Paul say to the Corinthians? He is saying the same thing to us. He is saying be courageous with your faith, be bold. It is what defines you.

And then he says, end of verse 13, very simply, be strong. Be strong. There is so much I could say about this but I am out of time but I want to tell you this. He is not saying work this thing up like be strong in and of yourself. He is not saying that at all. He is saying be strong in the Lord. He is saying, rest your strength in the Lord. Don't push through; don't fake it. Don't rely on yourself because we all might be weak; might sense that we are not strong. He says that is not a time to just do what the world does; have the whole self-help thing. Be inner-strong; have this inner strength rise up. No! That is not what Paul says at all. The idea is that our strength is always found in Jesus Christ.

Four back to back comparatives. Then look at verse 14 because we have this major shift in emphasis. Verse 14, he says, But all that you do be done in what? Love. All of this emphasis that you have moving forward, the sense of being alert, this sense that you are going to stand firm, that you are going to be courageous, you are going to be strong all couches itself in love. What kind of love? Well, remember I Corinthians 13. Self-sacrificing love. You know why Paul was telling the Corinthians ending his last command with love? Because the Corinthians were anything but loving towards one another. So he ends, he says, "Above all else, love one another." This is my last command, Corinthians, love one another, because without love, it really does not matter how alert, how firm, how courageous, how strong you stand. Love is the foundation. And he ends, drop down to verse 21. He ends by saying this, "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you." Then he models it, doesn't he? "My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen." What are we to be? What are we to be focused on? What are we to strive for? He tells us right here. He ends his powerful last word, "Be alert, be firm, stand firm in the faith, be courageous, be strong, be loving." Let us stand together. We will pray and close our time together this morning.