

# [United] True Unity: endure in mission

## 1 Corinthians 16

**MPS:** Gospel unity strengthens the church to endure in Kingdom mission.

**OBJ:** Every Christian can endure as the church in Kingdom mission by 4 encouragements.

**INTRO** In our series entitled “UNITED: Together in the Gospel: a study of 1 Corinthians” we’ve labored to learn how to live as a people united in the gospel of Jesus Christ. **Unity fuels God’s people for kingdom mission in the world.**

### ? What is gospel unity?

Unity in the church doesn’t mean everything assigned to the definition of this word. One definition states, “absence of diversity; unvaried or uniform character.” We know it is God himself that provides the diversity among His people in unity. But, the essence of unity means “that state of being one”. **God calls the church to unity because He is One. Unity in the local church displays the Oneness of our Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to carry out His work in the world.**

Paul sets forth a faithful explanation of the gospel and how God works in us to build us up in faith as we live by faith in Jesus. He provides what I refer to as three pillars of the Christian life, and the church, that forge Gospel-unity. In 1 Cor 1:18 we have the first pillar of unity, the “word of the cross”. **READ 1 Cor 1:18** In 1 Cor 2 we see the second pillar of unity, the Spirit-filled person. **READ 1 Cor 2:12-13, 15** 1 Cor 3 provides the third pillar of unity; Christians are the temple of the living God. **READ 1 Cor 16-17**

### ? How do we, LifePoint, the local church, live out a unity that faithfully displays the Oneness of our Triune God?

**TRANS 4 Encouragements** to endure in unity for Kingdom mission.

**Gospel unity fuels...**

### **1. Faithful Stewardship** **READ 16:1-4**

*Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. 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. And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me. **1 Cor 16:1-4***

A distinct need arose in the Jerusalem church that led Paul to call on all the churches to collect an offering. He establishes his direction for the Corinthians on sound, stewardship principles that build on faithful obedience and extend to generosity. **Faithful stewardship begins with regular, systematic giving that acknowledges God’s faithful provision and extends in sacrificial generosity.**

**Faithful stewardship is the longest standing operational principle for LifePoint.** The first Servant Team we formed was charged with the oversight of faithful stewardship. The influence, affect and blessing of the high priority of stewardship has propelled LifePoint to grow and mature in faithful stewardship, experience significant, gospel breakthroughs in people’s lives regarding finances and life stewardship, develop capital resources to host ministry and training, and resource an expanding, growing and developing missional impact. **God clear plan to resource His mission OF the local church are the faithful tithes and offerings OF His people, the local church.** God leads us into missional horizons that are far greater than us so He can bless us, increase us and use us to resource His mission in the world.

**APPL** The Lord has accomplished significant work through the faithful stewardship of LifePoint in our first 11.5 years. I’ve been continually humbled through the years as I’ve experienced, watched, considered and pondered the work of God among us in the area of faithful stewardship. And as I stated at our ten year anniversary, all that God has done to date only serves one grand purpose, that He might do greater work among us and through us. LifePoint, all that we are, all that we have and all that we have accomplished are ALL His. The Lord Jesus can use us as He will and pleases for His purposes.

We are but one united life lived for His glory alone. This is our one, resounding prayer; “Lord Jesus, use all that you have done and made us to be for your glory alone.”

The gospel grows every Christ-follower in faithful stewardship that the church might live in unity to resource God’s mission in the world. **Gospel unity fuels faithful stewardship.**

**? Christian, are you WITH us? Are you one with us as a faithful steward? Are we together?**

**Gospel unity fuels us to...**

## **2. Serve the Mission** READ 16:5-12, 15-18

*I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I intend to pass through Macedonia, <sup>6</sup>and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may help me on my journey, wherever I go. <sup>7</sup>For I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. <sup>8</sup>But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, <sup>9</sup>for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.*

*<sup>10</sup>When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am. <sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>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.*

*<sup>15</sup>Now I urge you, brothers—you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints—<sup>16</sup>be subject to such as these, and to every fellow worker and laborer. <sup>17</sup>I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence, <sup>18</sup>for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours. Give recognition to such people. **1 Cor 16:5-12, 15-18***

Paul customarily provides, in the final portions of his letters, direction for the churches regarding his co-laborers. We see this here as he shares his own travel plans, who will visit them and how the Corinthian church should receive these ministers. These directions provide insight into how the gospel is served by leaders and the congregation.

**Three fundamental principles provide direction and important reminders when serving in gospel mission. First**, the priority of gospel advancement is always greater than mere opportunity to do activity, no matter how much immediate good it may seem to do. (.8) Priority for gospel labor, usually established by gospel necessity, determines Paul’s next direction and steps for mission. This is not isolated to Paul, but serves as a guide for the church as well. The focused priority of money, people, energies and efforts should always be determined by gospel necessity. **A clear vision focuses the church to say “no” to good, but secondary matters in order to focus resources on first priority gospel advancement.**

**Second**, opposition always accompanies, and usually signifies priority for, gospel work. (.9) Some purport that opposition must mean something is wrong, not working or that God is not in it. The opposite is almost always true. **True gospel mission always raises the alarm and activates the attention of Satan’s servants.** They attack where they work is most effective. They protect most fiercely where the stronghold is greatest. They attack with greatest fervor where their work is most threatened. Satan’s greatest opposition sometimes arises from his direct activity, but most often from His strongest work arises through sin’s remaining presence in us. **Satan’s opposition always accompanies gospel work, but should never be a determining reason to stop the work.**

**ILLUS Satan’s opposition in a personal illustration.** Opposition almost arises strongest in a person’s life shortly after they turn to Jesus or begin to serve Him. This should not distract, but confirm that God is able to overcome any attack the Evil One presents. Some common phrases that remind us of this are: “The deepest valleys usually follow the highest peaks.” “Light shines brightest in the darkest night.” “The hardest swim is upstream in the strongest current.” **Christians are not called to avoid Satan’s attack and schemes, but by faith in Jesus to let their life be a demonstration of God’s overcoming power through them.**

*For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.*

**1 John 5:4**

**Third**, “change” IS the constant of mission. (.10-12, 15-18) God is the unchanging God who is ever-changing this world, until His work is complete. God perfectly completes every work that He starts. (Phil 1:6) Gospel ministry is the work of eternal transformation. How can we, for even a split instant, think that we can avoid change. Every season, situation and circumstance demands new approaches, new strategies, new priorities and new people serving in new ways. If He only left us to repeat what we had already accomplished, we would know we could do it and not need to follow by faith. [The gospel transforms and matures as God works in His people and among His people to lead them to new works.](#)

Paul lists a number of leaders and workers that would pass through Corinth. He encourages the church to embrace each of them, and to follow their leadership. [Faithful fellowship doesn't always have the opportunity of long tenure before they are called to follow. But, faithful fellowship remains essential so mission is not thwarted or stunted.](#)

Paul teaches the Thessalonians this same principle when he says, “*We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.*” (1 Thess 5:12-13) I feel compelled to let you in on a little secret; okay, a really big not-so-secret. We, the leaders of this church, do not have all the answers. We will not lead flawlessly. And, we will make more than our fair share of mistakes. But here's the good news, and some assurance. You don't follow us because of us. You follow us because of Jesus. He is worthy, and powerful enough to keep us. [Serving the mission means that whether you are currently leading or following, you are all walking after Jesus as He leads His church.](#)

**? Christian, are you WITH us? Are you one with us in serving the mission? Are we together?**

[Gospel unity fuels us to serve God's mission through the local church.](#)

**Gospel unity holds us to...**

### **3. BE the Church. READ 16:13**

**What does “BE the Church” mean?** It means that our identity will always determine, prioritize and compel our actions as a people following Jesus. The priorities we establish and the activity in which we engage holds us true to the convictions and values that define us. Paul quick-shots four general directives to help us “BE the church”.

**First**, “*Be Watchful*”. Preparedness and readiness are essential for faithfulness. Love God and love people as our defining commands mean we must know God and know people. And, it means we must keep these in their proper order. Alertness to God's work in the world to reveal His glory, bring about His purposes, and save people forms the first posture for every Christian. [When we remain watchful of the work of God in this world, we will be alert to opportunities and ministries \(ways to meet needs\) in which we can rightly love people in Jesus' name.](#)

**Second**, “*stand firm in the faith*” means we do not get distracted by serving lesser goods, get distracted by numerous engagements or fall prey to detrimental agendas and causes. Rather, we hold at all time and in all circumstances to the only power that holds us, the gospel of Jesus Christ. Faithful obedience to Jesus IS the most radical, counter-cultural life to live in this world. The Christian mandate is not to demonstrate how great we are, but how glorious, powerful and faithful our God who holds us when we entrust our lives to Him. The more chaotic and confusing the problems of our world, the more confusing the situations we find ourselves in, and the more complicated the details of our circumstances, the more laser focused we must remain on the gospel to hold us as ONLY Jesus is able. [No matter how soft, shaky, sinking or shifting the ground on which you stand, when you keep your life focused on Jesus by faith, you will stand.](#) Jesus is the immortal (1 Tim 1:17), imperishable (1 Cor 15:53), Lord of the impossible (Matt 19:26), and eternally immovable (Heb 6:17-18). [Jesus holds every life that by faith stands on Him.](#)

*Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Eph 6:13*

**Third**, “*Act like men*” is a third directive that Paul gives to the Corinthians. He wants them to grow up, in life and in the faith. He's already alluded to this once where he states, “*When I become a man, I gave up childish ways.*” (1 Cor 13:11) Maturity is essential to the church. **ILLUS** I read a book this week heralding the end of men in the world. Following the influence and

trajectory of feminist ideology in the world, the author shows how every structure, paradigm and institution in this world has nailed the coffin of masculinity shut.<sup>1</sup> There's only one factor she forgot to properly calculate, God's Word which always accomplishes its intended purpose.

**God ordained men to lead in the church.** One of Satan's greatest ploys is to distract men from active involvement in the church by distracting them with childish and immature preoccupations. Not everything that prevents us from growing up is inherently evil. But anything that prevents you from maturing in life and as a Christian is serving Satan's plan and not God's will for your life. **APPL** Men, this is not to exclude anyone else from God's purpose in the church but to speak directly to you. As I've already shared by greatest fear for LifePoint with you at our last men's night, so I repeat now. God intends your life to serve and lead in the church. He has designed you for this, and the fact that it is hard, threatening or otherwise makes you not want to only proves that sin is dominating you, and will continue to do so until you submit your life to Jesus' Lordship to be made as He, your Lord, intends to make you in order to use you for His Kingdom mission. Submit your life to Jesus. Repent of your sin to obey His will for you. Expend your life to serve Jesus' Kingdom.

**Fourth**, "*Be strong*" exhorts us to be as the one who fills us; be strong because Jesus in you is strong. This directly follows the previous directive. When Jesus rules your life, the strength of your life will be greater than you and accomplish more than you can alone. This is the strength in which Paul exhorts us. God specializes in doing great things through cowards (those who live in their own strength) and rebels (those who live for their own will and purpose). [The gospel strengthens us to let the power of God through Jesus Christ be lived out through us.](#)

? **Christian, are you WITH us? Are you one with us in growing up, maturing in Jesus Christ? Are we together?**

**Gospel unity holds us to BE the Church.**

**Gospel unity means we...**

#### **4. Let love prevail. .14**

Paul's exhortation in verse 14 alludes to the reverberation we create in the world by the way we live.

**ILLUS** I'm a sucker for outdoor shows. I recently watched a show on master trackers who were tasked with finding a lost hiker in the wilderness within a set period of time. They began with the hiker's starting point, her last known position. From there they began to search diligently for clues, using only basic techniques to locate signs of her presence. They found footprints, bent twigs and crushed leaves where she had trekked that led them to her.

**Let love prevail.** May the "trail we leave" with our lives be one of love that people might know where we've trekked by the 'aroma of love' with which we bless, the 'wake of love' that trails behind us, and the 'lyric of love' that reverberates after we are gone. May we continue to impact people with the very nature and character of our loving God. Let us not be satisfied to simply do the right thing, but to do the right thing in the right way, a spirit and attitude of love that lingers and prevails after we are gone. [When we complete our work for the gospel, may the resounding blessing of love fill people's eyes, hearts, minds and souls to draw them to Jesus.](#)

? **Christian, are you WITH us? Are you one with us as to let love prevail? Are we together?**

**Gospel unity means we let love prevail.**

**CLOSE**

? **Christian, are you WITH us? Are you one with us? Are we together?**

? **Is LifePoint enduring in Kingdom mission because you are strengthening her unity?**

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<sup>1</sup> *The End of Men: And The Rise of Women*, Hanna Rosin, New York: Riverhead Books, 2012.