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**Title:** *Embracing Hope*

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 16

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It's been a few years since I've paid much attention to the Pittsburgh Pirates, but recently they've been pretty good. I do not have a TV package that allows me to watch the games. I did several years ago. There used to be some management that was involved in Orchard Hill. And so, when they were really good about a decade ago, I was kind of into it, but I had younger kids at the time. I haven't been into it in a few years, and don't have the TV package.

So, a few nights ago I was like, I need to watch a little bit of the Pirates. I went to YouTube and found the YouTube game summaries where you get the ten-minute game, which is about enough baseball anyway if I'm being honest. And I watched a couple of the Pirate games in the ten-minute summaries and then I did a deep dive into my YouTube feed.

Does anybody ever do this? That's where you see what's in your YouTube feed right below what it was you were watching, and you say, oh, maybe I'll take a look at this. And here are some of the things that were on my YouTube feed. Now, this may say a lot about me more than about you, because you know your feed is an algorithm that says what are the kinds of things that you look at overall.

But there was something in my feed about why World War Three was imminent. There was something in my feed about why economic collapse is coming. There were things in my feed about things that happened to your body as you age and what you can do to forestall them. These were the things that were in my feed.

And I started watching these videos at like 10:00 at night. And after a half hour of watching these videos, I'm thinking, I don't like the world very much. I'm not encouraged very much. And so, I fall asleep, wake up the next day, go about my day, and don't think much of it, except that the world's a little hopeless in some ways.

When you look at things from a certain perspective, and I'm guessing I'm not the only one who feels some of that, the next day I get a text from my wife. My wife texted me this little line and it says, we need to have a calendar talk. Now, every couple has code texts in their relationship. This is one of ours. A calendar talk. By the way, I initiated

this as a code text. So, when I tell you that my wife texted me, all she's doing is giving back to me what I've given to her many times. Okay? So, this is not telling on my wife. This is just some context.

Whenever I send her a text that says we need to have a calendar talk or she sends this one to me, what it really means is I'm feeling a little overwhelmed with everything that's been going on in our lives right now. I want some of your help. So, I want a calendar talk so that you will help me with some of what I need.

Does anybody else have any of these kinds of texts in their relationship? Maybe we're the only ones. You're all sitting here like what are you talking about? Come on. I know that you know the kind of thing I'm talking about here. And the reason I tell you this is because now I have the experience of the evening of saying the world's a little overwhelming, and then I had the moment of saying our personal life feels a little overwhelming at the moment on a variety of levels. We have a bunch of kids coming home, and some other things going on, and there are just not enough days right now to make everything work.

What do you do when you feel a little overwhelmed or maybe hopeless at something global or something personal? What is it that you do? Some of us what we do is we say, well, it's time to get on the self-care bandwagon. It's time to reapproach self-care. What I need to do is take care of myself. And that's not a bad answer.

In fact, in the Bible, one of the concepts that we often ignore to our own peril is the idea of the Sabbath. What we tend to do is we tend to treat Sabbath like it means, well, I should check church off my list as long as I don't have anything better to do. And then I live the rest of my day like I do the other six days of my week. That's not the concept of the Sabbath. And so, self-care isn't a bad option, but sometimes you can't self-care your way out of a little bit of overwhelm or hopelessness.

Then what we try to do is say, well, I just need to manage my time better. If I can manage my time better, then I can take care of at least the personal side of it, if not the global side. But what happens for many of us when we do that is we may take care of a few more things, but we don't necessarily address the core of the problem.

We've been talking about hope these last few weeks. It's been the fourth of four series that have taken us all the way through the book of First Corinthians. First Corinthians dealt with a dysfunctional church that was in a dysfunctional culture with

instructions for it, but it ended with a note of hope. And so, we've talked about embracing hope and this idea that because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, when we feel hopeless, we can look back at the resurrection to gain hope, and look ahead to the resurrection of our bodies, to the reign of Jesus Christ for hope.

We can look within, not because of our strength, but to say, I won't tap out because of this hope. And today we're going to talk about looking around in terms of hope. But I want to start with a verse in Isaiah 58. This is verse ten. And this is what it says. It says, "... and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday."

This is a simple promise in the Old Testament that says when you're overwhelmed, when you're feeling a little hopeless, if you will give part of yourself away you will actually find hope being restored inside of you. By the way, our culture has figured this out. This is why so many companies now have, you know, Company X gives back or let's have a day of serving or something like this, a day of community.

Because what they've learned is that when we turn away from ourselves and say I'm going to do something for somebody else, it's a good thing for me. It's actually, again, a biblical idea. It's in Isaiah 58 that when we give ourselves to somebody else, we find hope. And in First Corinthians Chapter 16, we come to the end of First Corinthians and the end of these narratives about the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And all of a sudden, we get what appears to be at first, these just personal remarks where Paul talks about giving, and his journeys, and then he names a bunch of people toward the end of the chapter and a list of names, that if you ever do one of those Bible reading plans, you come to the names and it's like fast forward through the end of the list and move on to the next thing.

But here's what I think is happening for Paul as he comes to the end, and that is he's looking around and he's saying if I really have the hope of a resurrected Jesus, the hope of the future, then I want to share that hope in some substantial way. And I love how he phrases this in verse nine, "... because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me."

So, what is the opposition in a sense, and what are the opportunities? Well, opposition is in the culture that we live in, and the message of Jesus Christ is not

something that is celebrated. And what I mean when I say that is that the dominant narrative of our culture is that you need to be a good person on your own because there's a good group of people and there's a bad group of people.

I saw an article recently, it was called "A Return to Paganism," and they went on about how a pagan way of seeing the world is returning but how closely tied it is to a religious way of thinking. At one point they said this for them, speaking about just the general narrative in our culture. It said, "Tribal warfare isn't just a way of life. It's a system of divination with power and privilege, waxing and waning to reveal who is pure and worthy and who is evil and benighted."

And here's what that's saying. Our culture today is basically saying If you want to be a good person, here are the Orthodox views that you need to hold. And if you hold them, then you're good. If you don't, you're bad. And here's the message of Christianity that is throughout the book of First Corinthians. When Paul starts to talk about sharing hope, this is part of chapter 15, and it's implied here in 16, what he's saying is that ultimately the hope isn't that you can say I'm part of the good group that does things the right way and therefore I'm good.

But Christianity says none of us are part of the good group. All of us have sinned, and all of us fall short. And it's because of the goodness of Jesus Christ and my faith in Jesus Christ that I have hope and that I have certainty. Do you see the difference? But so many times, even in the church world, we want to live in tribalism that says, I follow this person, or I like this person.

This is part of the whole argument of First Corinthians is how people will choose upsides and say I like how this person teaches better than this person, so I'm one of them. And what we end up doing is we end up dividing over things that we don't need to divide over. And instead of living with a sense of hope, we live with a sense of I'm part of the right good group instead of part of a group and a community of people who need a savior.

And so, whenever the message of Christianity is talked about, the real hope is in coming to Jesus Christ. When we see it that way, what happens is that we then start to say the message of Christianity is not this message that I have to worry about being offensive because I'm talking about a message of hope.

And maybe here's a way to think about it. If you were walking in an arid climate, a desert, and there was a whole group of people walking with you and you were all out of water, but you knew definitively that a mile or two ahead there was an abundance of water that everyone could have. Do you think your default position would be I'm not telling anybody about the water because there were those who planned for the water shortage and those who didn't, or those who understood deserts and those who don't? That wouldn't be your thinking. It would be, hey, we can have water soon. And the message of Christianity ultimately is about the water, the living water of Jesus Christ being offered into the hopelessness that so many of us feel. And what First Corinthians 16 does is it basically talks about investing in three areas of our lives that will help bring hope to the world, and that by sharing that hope, we actually bring hope to ourselves. Because when we share hope, we actually are communicating hope.

The first area is in verses one through four, and this is with our resources. This is one of the realities of teaching just through texts of the Bible as you come to a passage like this. I can tell you I didn't choose this for today. This is what is in First Corinthians 16. Here's what it says, "Now about the collection for the Lord's people..." Now certainly it appears the church at Corinth was receiving extra money beyond the needs for their fellowship in Jerusalem, which was probably going through a famine at the time. And what he says is this. He says, "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 gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me."

Here you see five elements of giving. It was church-centered, verse one. It was in the church. A lot of times people will say, well I can give, but I'm going to give to the things that I want to give to. And certainly, I don't think all giving needs to be done in the church. But when the majority of your giving is done in the local church, what happens is all of the things that you start to say, well, the church should or maybe the church ought to, the church can start to do.

And so, a lot of times what people do is they get excited about extra things to give to and they'll say I want to give to this because I'm recognized. But when it's centered in the church, it's not our directed giving as much as saying I just trust the Lord to work through that ministry. Secondly, it's to be regular, the first day of the week. This is one

of the indications of the church changing from a Saturday to a Sunday as a primary day of worship. Then every week people brought their income, and it was for everyone, all the people, whether they had a lot or didn't have a lot.

And if you've been around when we've talked about giving at year-end, one of the things I'll often say is it's not about the amount, it's about the spiritual temperature. What I mean by that is if you're in middle school or high school and you're dealing with an allowance and you're like, someday I'll give. If you're starting out in life and you're saying when I get a little more, I'll give.

Or if you're saying I'm trying to pay down some debt, or I'm doing this or I'm doing that, then one day I'll give. You're missing the point because it isn't just about the amount. It's about what happens in you and about you saying I believe in something more than my own resources that I'm saying I'm giving, and it will actually produce hope in you. It's to be proportionate. He says here, in keeping with their income.

And then Second Corinthians chapter nine, verse six, teaches us that it's to be cheerful because the text says God loves a cheerful giver. Now, I've heard people say this over the years, and that is, well since I can't give cheerfully, I guess I don't give because I'm supposed to be cheerful, and I don't want to give uncheerfully. And therefore, you know, what can I do? Here's the issue. Ultimately, it becomes a hard issue to say If I can't give cheerfully, then I'm not understanding the eternal significance of my money.

There's a scene in an old movie that if you're younger, maybe you've seen, but probably not. It was called Schindler's List. I think it came out in the nineties and it was about Oskar Schindler who tried to help some Jewish people escape Nazi concentration camps. And toward the end of the movie, there's a scene that is very haunting. Because he walks around, he had lived in some opulence over his lifetime, some of it made through just different means around even the Jewish people, and he had always thought, well, I've done so much good that it doesn't matter. But as the concentration camps were being kind of freed, he went around all of his possessions and he basically said, if I had given this, it could have meant the lives of five more Jewish people. If I had not kept this for myself, it could have been the lives of ten more Jewish people.

And the reason I say that's haunting is as somebody who believes that Jesus Christ is the answer, what will be true for most of us at one point, if we understand the spiritual

significances, will say did I need 27 pairs of shoes? Okay, now I'm meddling. I know. But sometimes it's good to have that conversation and say if I really believe that there's hope, and I'm simply saying you know what, I just want something else because I'm bored with the stuff I have, then I'm not really living with a sense of hope. And even if you're a person who says, I'm not sure that I'm a follower of Jesus, I'm not sure I believe in Jesus, so I just want stuff for me. What you know intuitively, and this is why I say our culture has started to figure this out, what you know intuitively, is a life that's lived simply for yourself is not a very fulfilling life. And so, our culture has told us, well, we just need to give some gifts to other people who are less fortunate and that will help us assuage our feelings of insignificance with our resources.

But what we see in the Scriptures is that our hope is reflected in our resources. And that's why this is such an important thing to give, not because of need, but because it's something about us. In fact, in Matthew six, when Jesus was teaching in what's known as the Sermon on the Mount, at one point he says, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. And what's striking about that is that he doesn't say where your heart is, there your treasure will be, because that's what I would have expected him to say. Because usually what we think of as my treasure follows my heart, but Jesus actually turns it around. He says where your treasure is there your heart will be.

In other words, what you choose to invest in your heart will automatically start to follow. And so, when you choose to say I'm going to invest my resources in something, what you're doing is you're saying, I am looking around and I am starting to live with real hope. I think those of you who call this your church home and give, so many of you give so faithfully and generously to the regular fund, to the year-end funds, to the mission's funds of this church, but you're also expressing hope

There's a second area here, and that is our time and our talents. You see this in verses five through nine, and this is where he talks about going to Macedonia. And then he says, perhaps I will stay for a while or even spend the winter, or you can help me on my journey, verse six, wherever I go, for I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit. And then he talks about the opportunity and the opposition again. And so, he's talking here about his time and his talent. And as he's doing this, what he's doing is he's saying, I'm not just going to send some resources, I'm going to invest myself into this.

One of the reasons that we talk about serving isn't just because there's a need. But again, what happens when you participate in something is you're saying I am taking some of the hope that I have and making sure that it becomes something that other people get a chance to have as well.

I heard a story about a little boy who was walking on the beach one day and as he got to the beach, he saw that some starfish had washed up on the shore. He picked up one and he threw it back into the water to try to make sure that it would live. And then he picked up another, and another, and the whole beach was littered with these starfish. He was a little overwhelmed by it, but he kept throwing them back.

Then an older man came along and said kid, what are you doing? You're just wasting your time. You can't possibly throw all of these fish back in. It's not going to make a difference. The little boy thought about it for a moment, and he reached down and picked up another one. He threw it and he said but it made a difference to that one. Sometimes what happens is the overwhelming size of need can cause us to say, I'm not going to do anything because I can't do everything.

And what is probably a better expression of hope is saying if I can do everything, I can do something. And by doing something, what I'm doing is I'm choosing hope. So, we can invest our resources, time, and talent. And then I'm just going to say, and this is verses ten through twenty-four that we can invest in a sense, in people.

This is significant to me because as I look at this chapter after he talks about his resources, after he talks about his time and sense of what he could bring, he goes into this list about all of these different people. And there's a lot that could be said about all of these different people. But notice just a couple of things.

In verse 15, he says this. He says you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in this region. And so, there was a sense in which Paul was still connected to people that were not connected to the message of Jesus Christ. You know, there's a lot of studies that say when people come to faith in Jesus Christ, that a lot of people get so into church and church activities that within seven years they lose all their significant contacts with people who aren't churching.

One of the things that we hope to do here at Orchard Hill is to never become so inward facing that we forget that part of why a church exists is to help more and more people find and follow Jesus Christ. But it's always personal. It's never just corporate.



And one of the dangers of a church like Orchard Hill that does some things well corporately is to say well, I'll count on my church to do that rather than being engaged in it myself.

But again, this is part of the hope when you actually are engaged with people who if you really believe the message of Jesus Christ that Jesus Christ is the way and the truth and the life, and without Him no one comes to the Father. And that with him is eternal life because only through him are our sins forgiven. To not share that with somebody who needs that message is actually the opposite of love because you're just saying well, I just would rather not be offensive, or that hope isn't actually deep within us.

In verse 18, we see just the idea of restoration was part of his interpersonal care and investment in people. It says, "For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition." He had named them just before. Sometimes the way that we invest in people is to notice people who are on the margins and say I'm going to give of myself in a way that helps them feel refreshed.

We see in verse 16 this idea that some of the people helped Paul with the labor and so they were weight-bearing with him. It says, "to submit to such people and to everyone who joins in the work and labors at it." And then verse 20, he talks about this holy kiss. It says, "All the brothers and sisters here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss." Talking about just community. Holy kiss, by the way, we think it is probably cultural so don't lay one on somebody in the Lobby today. But it means a warm, personal greeting. That there's community.

Church was never designed to be a consumer event where you come and say how's the music, how's the teaching, how's everything, and you come, and you get your religious service, and you go. It's designed to be a community where you're connected to people and there's care.

And some of that at Orchard Hill happens in groups, but there's some of it that happens by people just paying attention to other people. And that's part of saying, I'm going to share hope along the way. Now, there's a couple of verses in this section that have just some things in them that are probably worthy of comment.

Verse 13 talks about being courageous. Some translations say to act like men. And there are those who look at that and say, this is another comment about gender roles. We'll do a Perspectives podcast on that someday. I just mention that that's there.

Verse 22 talks about being cursed, and he says whoever doesn't love the Lord let him be cursed. And a curse has the concept, if you look at how that word is used in the rest of the New Testament, of somebody who doesn't share in the eternal life of God. So what Paul's doing here is he's not just saying that spiritual life is about belief, about intellectual mere assent in checking a box of saying somewhere I prayed a prayer, but it's about a passion that comes from knowing at the depths of your being that you are redeemed by a God who has saved you when you couldn't save yourself. And so, you're filled with love. And he says, whoever doesn't have this love, let him or her be cursed.

So as a church, our hope when we come to the end of this book that was about some of the problems in a dysfunctional church, in a dysfunctional culture, is that the church that emerges here would be a group of people who are so filled with hope by looking back at the resurrection of Jesus, looking ahead to the resurrection of the body in the reign of Christ, that they can look within and continue to seek God and look around and say, who can we bring with us?

Now, we've done that in a lot of ways as a church over the years. One of the things you've heard us maybe talk about if you've been around, is what we call the cycle with students. Kids who are in Kidzburgh, KidsFest, maybe serve in middle school serve and then start to serve as high school leaders in KidsFest and reinvest in the community.

Every year just in KidsFest alone, I think this year we are going to have our biggest KidsFest ever. We moved it into the auditorium to facilitate a few more kids coming. But every year, just at the Wexford campus alone, we have 1500, 1700 to 1800 kids. This year it'll probably be more kids who come through here and then we have kids investing in them. And what we don't know is the ripple effects of what God might do in and through all those kids as they live and move in all parts of the world that emanate out from here. That's just one example.

But what happens sometimes for some of us, even when it comes to church, and I want to end with this because I think this is a helpful way to end teaching on First Corinthians. It's been about church, and the difficulty in the church. It's just a

reminder to say that by looking around and bringing hope to this world, the church can do something that education doesn't do, economic reform can't do, and politics can't do. And that it can reorient someone's heart toward God and bring hope for eternity, not just here's a quick drink of water, but up ahead there's so much water that we'll never thirst again.

I saw somebody had posted this some time ago. It's called "Church is Hard." Here's how it reads. It says, "Church is hard for the person walking through the doors afraid of judgment. Church is hard for the pastor's family under the microscope of the entire group. Church is hard for the prodigal son or soul returning home, broken and battered by the world. Church is hard for the girl who looks as if she has it all together but doesn't. Church is hard for the couple who fought the entire ride on the way to church. Church is hard for the single mom surrounded by couples holding hands and seemingly perfect families. Church is hard for the widow and the widower with no invitation to lunch.

Church is hard for the deacon with the estranged child. Church is hard for the person singing worship songs but overwhelmed by the weight of lyrics. Church is hard for the man who's insecure in his role in the community. Church is hard for the wife who longs to be led by somebody who loves the Lord. Church is hard for the nursery volunteer who has desperately wanted their own baby to love. Church is hard for the single woman and the single man praying that God may bring them a mate. Church is hard for the teenage girl who wears a scarlet letter because of the mistakes she knows that she's made. Church is hard for sinners. Church is hard for me. It's hard because on the outside it still looks shiny and perfect, Sunday best in behavior and dress.

However, underneath those layers, you find a body of imperfect people, carnal souls with selfish motives. But here's the beauty of the church. The church is in a building, a mentality or an expectation, but it's a body. Church is a group of sinners who've been saved by grace, living in fellowship as saints. It's a body of believers bound as brothers and sisters by eternal love.

Church is a holy ground where sinners stand as equals before the throne of grace. Church is a refuge for the broken hearts and a training ground for mighty warriors. Churches are converging of confrontation and invitation, where sin is confronted and hearts are invited to seek restoration. Church is a lesson in faith and trust. Church is a bearer of burdens and a giver of hope.

It's a family. A family coming together, setting aside differences, forgetting past mistakes, and rejoicing in the smallest of victories. Church, the body, the circle of sinners, turned saints, is where God resides. And if we ask, he is faithful to come even on our hardest days."

My hope is that as a church, a body, imperfect as this place is, as any place is, we will be a place where our hope is restored week after week, and that hope will emanate into this culture and this world and people say there's something about Jesus Christ that I want to be a part of.

And some of us who are here today may be new, maybe returning to church, maybe still in a season of trying to figure out what we believe. But even today, you can say, I know that it isn't my goodness and my way of behavior that somehow makes me right with God, but it's what Jesus Christ has done. By taking that step of faith, you can enter the family, the body.

For those of you who say, I believed that for a long time, I just want to remind you that the investment into the life of the church is part of what brings hope to you. But there will be days that it will just be hard and not feel like it does much. But if you'll commit to investing your resources, your time, and in people, you will see your darkness shine like the noonday sun as Isaiah 58 says. Because you'll see the God of the universe show up as you look around and say who can I share this hope with?

Let's pray. God, we ask today that you would meet each of us and that our understanding of you would grow, and our confidence in what you've done, what you will do, would be so strong that our desire to share that with others would bring real, lasting hope. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.