

PM 1 Corinthians 16 Lessons from life of Stephanas

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Preacher: Dr Jenson Lim

[0 : 00] Chapter 16. Oh, sorry, it's page 1158 in the Pew Bibles. Hear the Word of God.

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 until 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.

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.

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 unto Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me.

[1 : 23] 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, I strongly urge 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, 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.

Be subject to such as these, and to every fellow worker and labourer. I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence.

[2 : 33] For they refresh my spirit as well as yours. Give recognition to such men. The churches of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord.

All the brothers send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss. 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 our Lord Jesus be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen. Amen.

And our man made the Lord add his blessing to the public reading of his holy and inspired word. And this evening we will be looking at the life, or lessons from the life of Stephanas.

He's mentioned a few times in this particular chapter. Only a few times he's mentioned. But just in those few verses, we can kind of put together a little character study.

[3 : 48] And hopefully we trust derive some spiritual benefit from the life of Stephanas. It's obviously a short study because it's only a few verses.

In one sense it's good for people like myself, who only comes out here a few times a year, to be able to get one character and study this person, and for us to hopefully, like I say, derive some spiritual benefit.

So who is this Stephanas? We see he appears in a couple of verses. Verse 15. Now I urge you, brothers, you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and that they've devoted themselves to the service of the saints, and so on.

So Stephanas is pretty clear that he is one of the members of the church in Corinth, who, not just Stephanas, but even his converted family members were members of the church in Corinth, who visited Ephesus for the purpose of seeing Paul at some stage.

Now Stephanas was possibly an elder of the church, we don't know. Possibly an office bearer of the church.

[5 : 12] It's hard to tell. It's not really clear from the passages. But he's known in that congregation in Corinth.

He's a messenger. The main thing, he's a messenger of the church, and one who had several questions and concerns that he put together as a letter and asked Paul.

And it's likely that he delivered the letter from Corinth, when he, together with Fortunatus and Achaicus, met up with Paul, and gave him this particular letter, with all the various concerns and questions.

And Paul had obviously taken time to read, and to address those questions, which he responded in this particular letter. So that's why in chapter 7, for example, he wrote, Now concerning the matters about which you wrote, it is good for men not to have sexual relations with women.

So obviously that was a question that was asked. What do we do with such and such an issue? And now Paul is responding, Okay, considering the matters about which you wrote. So you wrote about this, and now this is my response.

[6 : 35] And this is the response which we have, we inspired response from Paul in 1 Corinthians. So, which is why it's kind of likely that Stephanas was probably an office bearer of the church, because he was tasked with writing all these, compiling all these various concerns and questions, and even delivering the letter to Paul, or the list of concerns to Paul.

But one thing we can say, first of all, is Stephanas was what is called a first convert. In the NIV and also in the ESV, he's the first convert.

If you have the authorized version, Stephanas is known as the first fruits, first fruits of Achaia. First fruits.

In some other translations, he's described as the first harvest. The first harvest. Interestingly, Paul, when he describes Stephanas, he said nothing about his job.

He said nothing about his family lineage. Nothing about that. We don't know anything about Stephanas, where he's from, what he does, or what he did, as far as job is concerned.

[7 : 58] We don't know anything about his family lineage. And perhaps there's a good reason for that. As one writer puts it, Stephanas, his piety was greater than that of others.

And perhaps they didn't want people to be distracted by his, you know, you know, his job or his family background. They don't want, Paul didn't want to distract people from that.

But, wanted to point out that this man is, is a godly man, he's a godly Christian man, and he has devoted himself to the service of others.

And so, by not saying anything else about Stephanas, he's focusing our minds on the fact that he was the first fruits, the first harvest, the first convert of Achaia.

Elsewhere, actually, in this first episode to the Corinthians, he did say that, in chapter 1, he did say that, Paul said that, I baptised also the household of Stephanas.

[9 : 08] Besides, I know not whether I baptised any other. So, it's very likely that Stephanas, and his family, were converted through the efforts of Paul, during his first period in Corinth, and was probably the first converts, and, not only just him, but also his, his family members as well, were converted as well, in Achaia.

And so, that allowed Paul to baptise him, and his family members as well. And, it's likely that Stephanas and his family members, those who had been converted and baptised, were appointed as helpers, and servants, and maybe in his case, an office bearer in the church.

And so, it was through Stephanas and his family, that this church was very much supported, not just financially, but just in practical terms. So, the family of Stephanas was very much, a main, a main, a member, and, and, and, and a very important member, and members of the church in Corinth.

Now, coming back to this point, about him being the first harvest, the first fruits, it's interesting, they, I'm not a Greek expert, but apparently the Greek, means something about, means something like, the beginning of a sacrifice.

First harvest, something about the beginning of a sacrifice. In the Old Testament, the first harvest can be anything, from fruits, crops, oil, olives, even, even animals as well, newborn animals and so on.

[10 : 51] And they are meant to be, the first harvest is meant to be, consecrated to God, first of all. In fact, in the book of Leviticus, we read, that, you cannot have, your final harvest, or the remaining part of the harvest, you can't have that, until, you offer up, your first harvest, your first fruits, to the Lord.

Okay, in Leviticus chapter 23, it says that, you cannot have any harvest, those, the harvest, the great harvest, of the rest of the crop, until your first fruits, is offered to God, first of all.

So, this first fruits, is a very important, very important, a signal, to, to, to, to, to remind, those, certainly in, in, in those days, to remind the farmers, that, they must be thankful, for their first fruits.

All comes from God, the first fruits, is to be offered to God, as a, thanksgiving offering, to the Lord. But, not only is he, is the first fruits, meant to be given, as a, as an offering to the Lord, in thankfulness, but it's also, to remind the farmers, there's greater things to come.

Yeah, so it's not just to give, that first fruits, the first harvest, to the Lord, in thanksgiving, but it's also to say, I'm looking forward, to that great harvest, that is going to come, after this lot.

[12 : 27] Okay, and in fact, it's, it's not just for the crops, but, even believers, in the Lord Jesus Christ, James, the Apostle James, described, believers, as, first fruits, of, his creatures, first fruits, of his creatures, that's how he, he describes believers, so in other words, believers, are, not only, to be consecrated, to the Lord, but believers, also signal, there's going to be, a great harvest, so if, if you are a believer, this day, wonderful, your, your life is, consecrated to the Lord, you're, you're supposed to be, devoted to the Lord's work, but it also says, something to you, and to me, and that is, hey, there's more, coming after me, there's more, coming after you, you're not the, the end of it all, yeah, when you become a Christian, it doesn't mean that, that's it, you know, you may be the first, in your family, to become a Christian, but there's more to come, now, we may not know, when it's going to be, but the point is, there's more, along the way, there's more, converts, after you, and so, by saying that, this Stephan is the first, convert, the first fruits, of Achaia, the Apostle Paul is saying, hey,

Stephan is only the first, of many, yeah, he's not the only ones, okay, he and his family, are not the only ones, there's more to come, in his family, and perhaps, his, not just his family, but the influence, from Stephan is going to spread, to his family, to his friends, to his work colleagues, and so on, so it's going to, it's going to be, it's not just the end of it, you know, it doesn't mean that, he's a convert, means that's it, that his influence, is going to spread, in his life, time, and beyond, and that is, certainly, it should be a comfort for us, and should be an encouragement for us, you know, when we, when we come to faith in Christ, you know, one of the things, that we should be doing, is to pray for others, you know, the blessing of being converted, we, you know, we receive many blessings, by being Christians, when we become, a genuine believer in Christ, we receive so many answers, to prayer, so much guidance, from the word of God, so much comfort, that we can derive, from the word of God, so much help, and warnings, if needed, there's so many blessings, that we receive, from the word of God, and there's heaven, to come as well, but we must always pray, for those who come after us, those of us, with children, we pray for our children, and we must pray, for our children, we pray for their salvation, we pray that they may, all come to faith in Christ, and it's a great blessing, when you see that, happen in your lifetime, so this is something, for us, to take note of,

Stephanus, is a first fruit, he's a first harvest, but he's not just, the only one, there's more, to come after him, and his influence, is going to be seen, in, maybe not, written in scriptures, but certainly, in his lifetime, and beyond, but something else, that we can say, about Stephanus, he's not just, a convert, and a convert with influence, and a convert with, who will pray for others, but Stephanus, is also one, who loved, the Lord, and his church, now I know, this seems pretty obvious, but let's, let's look at it, in a bit more detail, he loved the Lord, and his church, now you may say, well, surely that's pretty obvious, but, think about it, think about it, okay, Stephanus, and his family, is in the midst, of the church, in Corinth, now if you know, anything about the church, in Corinth, you read the entire, episode to, the first Corinthians, you know that, the Corinthian church, is very, very mixed, or perhaps, we may say today, is very messed up, it's not, a very pleasant place, to some extent, you know, it's still the church, of Jesus Christ, but there are, many, many issues, the issues which, he had brought forward, to, to the apostle Paul, and Paul has addressed it, in this letter, and so we know, what those questions were, because of the answers, that are given, in this epistle, so for example, there are issues, of worldliness, and so, the apostle Paul, wrote in, chapter 3, but I brothers, could not address you, as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ,

I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you're not ready for it, even now, you're not yet ready, for you're still of the flesh, for that while, there is jealousy, and strife among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving, only in a human way.

So evidently, one of the questions about that, one of the concerns that Stephanas has raised is, look, this church has got all these characters behaving in such a way, what's going on?

[17 : 51] And Paul is saying, well, there's worldliness. There are people who are not spiritually minded in the church. Another example is arrogance. Arrogance. You can't imagine that. Christians are meant to be humble and exercise humility to follow the Lord, but we read in chapter 4 verse 18, some are arrogant as though I were not coming to you, but I will come to you soon if the Lord wills, and I will find out and I will find out not the talk of those arrogant people, but their power.

And so on. So evidently, Stephanas was asking Paul about, you know, the character of some of these people and what's going on, and Paul's answer to him is, well, some of them are just plain arrogant.

This is happening in the church, yeah? This is not people outside the church. This is happening in the church. And then, of course, there's the horrible event of lawsuits against believers in chapter 6.

You don't need to read that file. It's already there in the superscript. Christians who are suing each other. But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers.

You know, Stephanas is probably scratching his head, talking to his family, saying, you know, what's going on? You know, there's this person, Mr. A, suing Mr. B, and in front of the unbelieving community outside, they're looking in and saying, oh, what's up with this church?

[19 : 24] People are suing each other in the courts. They're not settling like people who love the Lord and love each other, but they're suing each other. And the unbelieving society, they're looking at them, thinking, what's going on in this place?

And so, Stephanas is asking Paul, what's going on? And Paul is saying, well, yeah, exactly. What is going on? There's all these issues. And then, of course, there's, I wouldn't go into the slightly more horrendous things about the incestuous affair going on.

In the midst of all these, what's going on in the church in Corinth? You've got Stephanas and his family. Now, let's be honest. If you and I are in this situation, you know what we would do?

Pack up and go. We would just pack up and go and say, well, what's going on? I have enough of this. I'm out. And certainly, in this day and age, you have people who leave churches for less reasons, for even minor reasons than that.

But this is a situation where you can look and you can say, actually, you know what? If he were to leave with his family, he has got a good reason. He's got a jolly good reason to leave his church.

[20 : 41] But you know what? He's there. Stephanas is there. He hasn't left. He actually put up with all these characters.

Surely, the only reason why he's doing that is because he loved the Lord and he loved his church. He loved the Lord and he loved his church. There's no church hopping in Stephanas' mind.

The thought didn't cross his mind that, oh, I'm done with this place. He's there, still laboring in the church, still delivering the letters, still encouraging Paul and so on, which we'll touch on later on.

He's there. And of course, we know that he loves the church and we know that he loves the Lord because we read in verse 22, if anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed.

So it's evident that Stephanas truly loves his Lord and he loves the church of Jesus Christ. That's really something that for us to learn, certainly for all of us to learn, even for myself as an office bearer, I have to learn this lesson as well.

[22 : 00] If Dumfries or Dumblane, our church, I hope, I trust, we're nowhere in that position like the church in Corinth and if that's the case, then we've got every reason to stick around and to help the church of Jesus Christ and to serve the church of Jesus Christ in any way possible.

And that's a lesson for all of us, I'm sure. This is where the Lord is leading us to help the church of Jesus Christ where the Lord has placed us.

You know, and somebody once wrote, love makes the Christian do wonderful things. You know, and I think this is what's, this is one of the beauties of Stephanas, the character of Stephanas.

He truly exhibits love for the Lord. And there's more we can say about how Stephanas demonstrates love for the Lord. We can say that he contributes to the church.

He contributes to the church. not necessarily financially, although that's implied, but certainly we read in verse 17, I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and the Caiacus because they made up for your absence for they refresh my spirit as well as yours.

[23 : 21] Give recognition to such men. He's somebody who contributes to the church for that which was lacking on the part that they've supplied.

There's something that's missing or something that's just lacking in the church in Corinth and Stephanas kind of fills that gap as it were.

Now, again, like I said, we don't really know what exactly is that. Some say it could be the gift of financially giving and partly because of the beginning of chapter 16, we read, on the first day of every week, each of you is to put aside and store it up as he may prosper so there will be no collecting when I come.

About setting aside a certain sum of money in keeping with your income is how the NIV puts it. So, perhaps this is a gift that Stephanas and others pulled together for Paul to redistribute to other Christians.

So, he was there. Stephanas is there in the thick of things. when it comes to the contribution to the church to other Christians. Not just Stephanas, but Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus.

[24 : 44] There's three of them. They're there contributing to the church. But, and I say, like I say, it may not necessarily be financial, but it's something that they're giving towards the church.

They're filling that gap that Paul has identified. But not only that, but Stephanas was also a laborer for the Lord.

So, he demonstrates his love by actually being a laborer for the Lord. We read in verse, again in verse 15, the second half, and that they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints.

And that they've devoted themselves to the service of the saints. Now, in the authorized version, it's got this slightly strange phrase, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints.

Somehow, that doesn't seem to sit very well in this day and age. The original apparently means something like this. It's the root word used in, perhaps those of you with better Greek grammar will correct me, but it's commonly used in the military to mean something like appointing or commissioning, to arrange something in order, to put something in its place, to appoint, and so on.

[26 : 15] So, something that is done like typical military fashion in orderly, rank and file fashion. Elsewhere, this same word appears in Acts of the Apostles, chapter 15, we read, when therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined or they commissioned or they appointed that Paul and Barnabas and certain other of them should go up to Jerusalem unto the Apostles and elders about this question.

It's the kind of same kind of word that's being used. So, what does this mean for Stephanas as a labourer? Well, it means that Stephanas as a labourer had focus.

He had his labouring in the Lord was purposeful, not purposeless, but purposeful. He wasn't easily sidetracked or distracted, but he had very much a focus on what needs to be done, where are the gaps in the church, where is what is needed in the church, and I, my family and I, will fill that gap and will devote ourselves to the service of God in the Lord's house.

So, for example, Stephanas was said to refresh, refresh my spirit as well as yours in verse 18. He said to refresh Paul's spirit as well as the church's spirit.

That's no small task, we can say. That's no small task. He refreshed Paul's spirit and the church. Now, how, how did Stephanas do that, you may ask?

[27 : 59] How is he refreshing the apostle Paul's spirit as well as the church, the church in Corinth? Well, the one thing he was doing was writing letters and greetings and encouraging friendship and fellowship between the church and the apostle based on this letter, this response letter from Paul who wrote in response to the questions and concerns from Stephanas and others.

Now, you may say, well, that's no big deal, but actually, you know, this is the pre-internet age, in fact, it's the pre-writing, pen and paper card writing age, it's the pre-post office, royal mail, mailman kind of age, where if you wrote the letter in those days, you wrote with a purpose, you wrote with a focus and with a purpose, and he did that, and he did that, and that in and of itself actually lifted the spirits of Paul.

Paul, that's quite amazing if you think about it, and not only lifted the spirits of Paul, but lifted the spirits of the church as well. Despite all the problems that we read in 1 Corinthians, there are those who were lifted up and encouraged through Stephanas, encouraging letters and greetings and friendship and so on.

Perhaps he refreshed the way he and his family and others like him, Fortunatus and Achaicus, you know, those trio were there to refresh, like the way Jesus refreshed his believers, his friends.

Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. You know, Stephanas' presence and his fellowship was something to be desired, something to be enjoyed and loved, and his presence in the church was a refreshing presence.

[30 : 13] You know, he ministered to the saints, you know, he showed hospitality to those who are needy, and those who are, not just those who are needy, but those fellow laborers in the gospel, he showed hospitality to them.

Thus he was showing kindness and hospitality to Paul, he and the trio, Stephanas, Stephanas, Fortunatus and the Caracus, his family involvement as well.

You know, their presence is there and their presence are felt in the church. And their presence lifted up the spirits of some. Perhaps there are those who are a bit like him, you know, struggling, you know, wondering what is going on in this place, all the various issues and problems in this church, what's going on?

Ah, Stephanas there, Stephanas there, the door, you know, a smile on his face, an encouraging word. You know, it sounds like I'm reading too much into it, but you know, you can think about how he is refreshing the spirits of Paul as well as the church, as well as yours, the church.

You know, somebody wrote, there's something wonderful and lovely and encourages the church when there are long-standing devoted servants who refresh leaders and the congregation.

[31 : 36] I can't remember who said that, but I thought it's a wonderful quote there. There's something wonderful and lovely and encourages the church when there are long-standing devoted servants who refresh leaders and the congregation.

So, Stephanas' character does teach us and encourage us to submit ourselves to the Lord's work and to, even though he may or may not be an office bearer, we just don't know, but he can still function in such a way that the apostle Paul makes mention of him.

That's no small task. That's no, he's not just some, you know, big name, you know, pastor and so on. No, we don't know much about him, but what we know about him, we know that he refreshed the spirit of Paul and the church.

You know, far too often we read in this day and age, you know, the debates that goes on in the so-called established church about, you know, women deacons and in the whole homosexual marriage and all the rest.

There's so much talk about all these things. Does anyone talk about the person who puts out the chairs for Sunday service or weeknight meetings?

[32 : 52] Is there any talk about how do we honour the person who teaches the children in Sunday schools? Is there any encouragement for such, those who prepare the teas and coffees for us?

Is there anyone who acknowledges such people within our congregations? And so first we need to ask ourselves, are we those who refresh the spirits of our fellow saints?

Are we like Stephanas who refresh the spirits of other leaders, your fellow office bearers or anyone?

Are you the sort of person to refresh the spirit of others? Are you that sort of person? You know, we're talking about genuine refreshing of the spirit.

I'm not talking about what you see in social media, you know, in Facebook, Instagram, you know, you put your thumbs up, you know, done and dusted, yep, I've encouraged somebody.

[33 : 54] No, we're not talking about that, we're talking about real, genuine, encouraging, refreshing the spirit of others. Is that something that we are doing?

Is this something that we're doing? If we're not, then is this something that we need to think about? Is this something that we need to think about? You know, we're here in this place, in this room, you know, how are we encouraging others?

How are we encouraging others? Because you never know, the person sitting next to you, the person sitting in front of you, behind you, wherever, they may be going through a difficult time. They may be like another person in the church in Corinth, struggling, wondering what is going on.

Maybe not about church issues, but maybe just daily life. Well, are we there to refresh the spirits and to lift up the spirits? Or are we not doing that?

Is that something we should do? And that's what my next point is. What should the church do? What should the church do? And the answer is very simple. It's in verse 18 itself. Give recognition to such men.

[35 : 06] Or in the NIV, such men deserve recognition. In the authorized version, therefore acknowledge ye them that are such. Acknowledge them.

Give them due recognition. recognition. You know, it's perhaps the reason why Paul said this, and again, we have to kind of think, if this is the response of Paul, it means that something has been going on in the background, which means Paul had to respond to whatever this thing is going on in the background.

And perhaps Paul had heard, oh, Stephanas is just this messenger boy. You know, he's just the runner in the church, you know, perhaps they are saying that, you know, this Stephanas, oh, you know, he's just a nobody.

You know, he just brings letters here and there. No big deal. Perhaps some people in the church, perhaps they were treating Stephanas in contempt. You know, and Paul is saying, no, no, no, no, no.

Give recognition to such men. They refresh my spirit as well as yours. Give recognition to such men. Give recognition to such men.

[36 : 30] John Calvin wrote, if we wish to secure the welfare of the church, let us always take care that honor be conferred unto the good, that the councils have the greatest weight, their advice, their guidance, have the greatest weight.

Let others give way to them and allow themselves to be governed by their prudence. You know, I think that's very true. They were told to acknowledge, show your appreciation to Stephanas and his family, give them due recognition.

The church in Corinth was encouraged to do that. They were encouraged to do that. And I think that's a lesson for us. Perhaps, I don't know Dumfries very well, but you know exactly who are those who are helping to lead this church and helping with the ministry of this church.

We've seen this morning already, what, 12, 10, 12 people from Iran and Eritrea, what are we doing for them?

Or if we are not able to do something for them, are we encouraging those who are doing something for them? And encouraging them, being Stephanas, encouraging them, refreshing their spirits, and so on.

[38 : 01] Are we helping in the ministry of the church? Are we doing that like Stephanas? You know, I think this is what, that's why I say the title of my sermon is Lessons from the Life of Stephanas.

Only a couple of verses here and there, but enough to put together a picture of what Stephanas is like, and I believe what the Christian faith is all about.

You know what I believe the Christian faith is all about. The Lord has saved us, the Lord has blessed us. If we are converted to Christ, if we are first fruits of the faith, if we are first converts, what are we doing?

What are we doing to ensure that there are others who come after us? Are we praying for them? Are we looking for greater fruits, more fruits to come, not just with us?

Do we love the Lord and his church like the way Stephanas did, despite the church that he was in? He's still there, he's still ministering and helping others.

[39 : 13] Do we labour for the Lord? Do we encourage others? Do we refresh the spirits of others in our own congregation? Well, just some thoughts there for us to consider this evening.

May the Lord help us in our own journey and in the journey of this church in Dumfries? Do we please? Do we ■ into a I salvar themselves in hubris Hause and have had grace alar with us