

“Don’t Waste Your Life” 1 Corinthians 16:1-12

Introduction

- From 1951 to 1989 the [Fernald Feed Materials Production Center](#) fabricated uranium fuel cores at a facility about 20 miles from my childhood home and about 5 miles from my Dad’s office. Sixty-seven percent of all the uranium used in the nation’s cold war nuclear weapons program was processed at Fernald—right in my own backyard.
- For most of its life Fernald operated in obscurity. But there were always rumors of mismanagement and neglect and even leaks. In the late eighties peoples fears were confirmed; the rumors were true. After a lawsuit and an investigation the first visitors were allowed on the high security site and saw “workers walking around in short-sleeve shirts with their arms covered with radioactive yellowcake.”¹
- During the thirty-eight years it was open Fernald purified 500 million pounds of uranium but it also generated 1.5 billion pounds of radioactive waste. To quote a [New York Times](#) article, “When the Department of Energy ran out of room to bury waste at the 1,050-acre Fernald site, officials ordered it packed into 100,000 metal drums, which were left outside, exposed to the elements. Accidental releases covered 11 square miles of surrounding farmland in radioactive dust. Officials at the Fernald center dumped radioactive waste into pits just 20 yards from a creek that sits directly atop the Great Miami Aquifer, one of the biggest and cleanest aquifers east of the Mississippi. At the time of its closing Fernald held the largest concentration of poisonous radon gas in the world.”²
- [A.W. Tozer](#) once said, “A man by his sin may waste himself, which is to waste that which on earth is most like God. This is man's greatest tragedy, God's heaviest grief.”³ The toxic waste of Fernald is one thing, but the waste of a life is the far greater tragedy.

Transition

The challenge for us this morning is simple. Don’t become a Fernald.

Proposition

- **Don’t waste your life**
- How do you know if you’re living strategically for God or just wasting your life? When we last left off in 1 Corinthians the picture Paul gave us of the Christian life was one of energy and action and momentum all because of one thing—the resurrection. *Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.* Because Christ has been raised the follower of Christ is catapulted into action, labor and work for this living Savior; which is exactly what we see as we start chapter 16.
- Chapter 16 is a snapshot of Paul’s life. His letter is almost finished. He’s through with defending his ministry. He’s through pointing out the turtles in the road. He’s through with the theological battles. We just get to see Paul the man. We get to peer behind the curtain of

¹ “Nuclear Site Nears End of Its Conversion to a Park” by Christopher Maag, *New York Times*, Sept. 20, 2006.

² “Nuclear Site Nears End of Its Conversion to a Park” by Christopher Maag, *New York Times*, Sept. 20, 2006.

³ A.W. Tozer, *The Root of the Righteous*. Christianity Today, Vol. 41, no. 5.

his life to see his heart, his ministry, his travel itinerary. And we get to meet some of the people he's influenced. You know what? This chapter is the picture of a man who's living what he's preaching. He's not wasting his life. He's just told the Corinthians that the resurrection produces fruitful, productive labor for Christ. And that's what we see in Paul's life. I think there are some lessons for us in this.

Transition

In chapter 16 we see Paul capably managing three resources.

Organizational Sentence

- **If we waste these three resources we waste our lives**
- [Slide #1] In the words of Warren Wiersbe, "This chapter may seem unrelated to our needs today, but actually it deals in a very helpful way with three areas of stewardship: **money** (verses 1-4), **opportunities** (verses 5-9), and **people** (verses 10-24). These are probably the greatest resources the church has today, and they must not be wasted."⁴ Certainly there are other things God asks us to manage. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list. But these are three areas where Christians and churches are prone to wasting. And if we waste these resources we waste our lives for God. We waste these things and we become human Fernalds.

Transition

Look at **verses 1-4** and the **first resource** we are prone to wasting. *Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. 2 On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. 3 Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. 4 If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me.*

Main Points

- We know from Romans 15:26 that the Christians in Jerusalem were impoverished. Nobody is really sure what caused this poverty. It might have been the famine of forties. It might have been their extreme generosity which then led to their poverty. Maybe they were ostracized for following Christ. Who knows. What we do know is that Paul made three missionary journeys through the regions of Greece and Asia Minor and on his third tour of the Mediterranean he organizes a collection for those impoverished Christians in Jerusalem; it's at the top of his agenda of things to do. And Christians have been meeting the needs of other Christians ever since.
- [Slide #2] Look at what he does. He's obviously already organized the collection of funds among the churches of Galatia, **verse 1**, the churches of Antioch of Psidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe. And now he's writing to organize it in Corinth. Do what the Galatians have done. *On the first day of every week, each one of you set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collection will have to be made.* Take a special offering. This isn't a denominational tax. This is not part of their normal giving. It's an

⁴ Wiersbe, Warren W. *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. 2 vols. Wheaton: Scripture Press, Victor Books, 1989, 1:621.

“irregular local contribution.”⁵ In the words of [Gordon Fee](#), “No pressure, no gimmicks, no emotion. A need had to be met, and the Corinthians were capable of playing a role in it. In a day of highly visible campaigns for money on every side, there is something to be said for the more consistent, purposeful approach outlined here.”⁶

- [Slide #3] And Paul says to take the offering before he comes. Be diligent and plan ahead. By the way, if you don't plan to be generous it will never happen. Every Sunday, he says, the first day of the week, set a little aside and have the collection saved up by the time he comes. [Anthony Thiselton](#) says, “There is to be no last minute superficial scraping around for funds as an unplanned off-the-cuff gesture.”⁷ Then when Paul arrives, his plan is to take the money with an entourage of credible, reliable men, so that no accusations of financial mismanagement can be thrown around, and deliver the money in person to the Christians in Jerusalem. Of all the things an apostle could give his time to this is what Paul spends time doing. Collecting money for some poor Christians.
- This is a big deal. What you do with your money is a huge deal. How you manage it is a huge deal. What we do with our money as a church is a huge deal. How we manage it as a church is a huge deal. Money is for meeting needs otherwise it's been mismanaged. Your money is for meeting needs otherwise you've waste your life. Holding onto your money is like stuffing toxic waste in barrels stored out in the elements. Keeping your money, clinging to it is toxic. We're not generous enough. None of us.
- All of us would have so much more to give without great sacrifice if we, as [Craig Blomberg](#) suggests, just lived in smaller homes, bought less expensive cars, ate less, ate out less, bought fewer clothes, utilized garage sales more, car pooled, bought more used things instead of new things, conserved water, recycled more, watched videos instead of going to movies, avoided cable television, bought in bulk or wholesale, used our bikes more, didn't fly as much, shared expensive household tools and equipment with one another, set up baby-sitting cooperatives, gardened for food, spent less money on pets, conserved more energy in our homes, planned more modest weddings and funerals.⁸ The list is endless.
- Now here's the key. Why are we to be generous? What motivated Paul? What should motivate us? The reason there is even a collection is because there is a gospel. 2 Corinthians 8:9. *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.* We are to be generous people because our Savior is a generous Savior.
- Unfortunately, Paul's words here don't stick. He has to write to them again motivating them to finish this collection. I want to read a few of his words in 2 Corinthians 8 and as I read his words there I want you to think of the unfinished business in your own life. Each of you knows one or two or three specific needs of others that are going unmet. Maybe God has even put it on your heart to do something about it but you haven't. These words are for you concerning those unmet needs.
- *And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. 2 Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty*

⁵ Thiselton, p. 1318.

⁶ Fee, p. 817.

⁷ Thiselton, p. 1324.

⁸ Blomberg, p. 328.

welled up in rich generosity. 3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. 5 And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. 6 So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. 7 But just as you excel in everything--in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us--see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

- 8 I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. 9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.
- 10 And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. 11 Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. 12 For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.
- 13 Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. 14 At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, 15 as it is written: "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little."

Transition

Look now at [verse 5](#) and the [second resource](#) we are prone to wasting. *After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you--for I will be going through Macedonia. 6 Perhaps I will stay with you awhile, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go. 7 I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. 8 But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, 9 because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me.* If you waste opportunities for ministry you waste your life.

- [Slide #4] [Verses 5-9](#) are Paul's travel log. He's writing to the Corinthians from the city of Ephesus—and he plans to stay there until Pentecost or springtime when the weather for travel is most favorable. His plans are to go to Corinth via the over land route through Macedonia and the cities of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea, arriving in Corinth in the fall and with the hope of wintering there. And the reason Paul doesn't come to them sooner is because, as [verse 9](#) says, *a great door for effective work has opened to me.*
- Obviously, this *door* is a metaphor for opportunity. Paul says it's not just any opportunity it's a great door emphasizing the wide scope of the opportunity.⁹ And he doesn't want to waste that opportunity. He puts off good things. Necessary things. Important things in order to take full advantage of the present ministry opportunity.
- Any idea where the world's largest door is? Try NASA's Vehicle Assembly Building at the Kennedy Space Center. There are actually four doors there—each 465 feet tall—that's 151 feet taller than the Statue of Liberty.

⁹ Thiselton, p. 1330.

- The application for us is quite simple. In Scripture, God is the opener of doors.¹⁰ He has opened doors for ministry in your life that are as wide and tall and great as the doors at the Kennedy Space Center. The question is have you even noticed them? And if you have, do you have the courage to walk through them. Because sometimes open doors have opposition. Paul says at the end of [verse 9](#), that many oppose him as he seeks to take advantage of the opportunity.
- [Frederick Buechner](#) once said, “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.” That’s your open door. Just take a moment and think about what that open door might be. Write it down. Pray today and this week and ask God to show you what doors of opportunity he’s opened for you. And then walk through the door. Don’t waste your life.

Transition

Look at [verse 10](#). *If Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am. 11 No one, then, should refuse to accept him. Send him on his way in peace so that he may return to me. I am expecting him along with the brothers. 12 Now about our brother Apollos: I strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers. He was quite unwilling to go now, but he will go when he has the opportunity.* [[Slide #5](#)] What’s the [third resource](#) we are prone to wasting? [People](#).

- In these verses Paul mentions two coworkers who are carrying on the work of the Lord as he is, Timothy and Apollos. “Timothy was born in Lystra in Asia Minor to a Greek father and a Jewish mother, Eunice. He, his mother, and grandmother probably became Christians when Paul and Barnabas preached in Lystra during their first missionary journey. When Paul returned a year later, he invited Timothy to join him and Silas.
- Somehow, he managed to stay out of harm's way—he was not jailed with Paul and Silas in Philippi, and he avoided the riot in Thessalonica. But when Paul needed an envoy to return to Thessalonica to encourage the new believers there, he sent young Timothy. Later, Paul sent Timothy as emissary to Corinth, where he preached for some time.
- In 1 Corinthians 4:17 Paul called Timothy his *beloved and faithful child in the Lord*. When Paul was imprisoned in Rome, it's Timothy he asked to "come before winter" to comfort him.”¹¹
- Who’s your Timothy? God wants us to pour ourselves into others. Who has he placed in your life for that specific purpose? If you aren’t pouring your life out for someone else, mentoring them, molding them, discipling them, then you’re wasting your life.
- And Apollos? Paul strongly urged this man to return to Corinth, [verse 12](#). If you’ll remember from chapter 1, there’s an Apollos faction at Corinth. From Paul’s perspective, you’d think Apollos would be the last person he’d want to return to Corinth. And yet there’s no lost affection for the man. No burned relational bridges. He and Apollos are partners together.
- You know what? We are people wasters. We fail to make time for people. Churches fail to utilize people’s gifts. The young and old are marginalized as barriers to ministry instead of

¹⁰ DBI, p. 607.

¹¹ "Paul and His Times," *Christian History*, no. 47.

being seen for what they are; people with incredible resources for ministry. We give up on people too easily. We write people off. I bet every single one of us in this room can think of someone, a brother or sister in Christ nonetheless, that we've just written off. "They'll never change" we say. We are all guilty. And in wasting the greatest resource we have, people, we waste our lives.

Conclusion

- [Slide #6] In September of 2006 the unimaginable happened. Fernald opened for a second time. But it's not what you're thinking. After a 13 year, 4.4 billion dollar cleanup Fernald opened a second time as a natural, undeveloped park. Part of the site is a landfill that's off-limits to the public. The remaining 930 acres, however, now include hardwood forest, prairie and wetlands intended to recreate the area's natural environment before European settlers arrived.¹² Native bird species not seen in the area for decades are back. Two endangered species, the Indiana brown bat and Sloan's crayfish, have been spotted on the site. Deer now wander the roads, and great blue herons stand motionless in ponds.
- What once was toxic has been reclaimed. And that's God's promise for us. Up until this point, your life may be the picture of waste; wasted money, wasted opportunities, wasting people. You're a mini-Fernald. And through the grace of Jesus Christ, through the power of the resurrection God says life can be different.

¹² "Nuclear Site Nears End of Its Conversion to a Park" by Christopher Maag, *New York Times*, Sept. 20, 2006.