

SERMON SERIES: "The World Series of Stewardship"  
SERMON TITLE: "Get a Base Hit: Plan for Giving"  
SERMON TEXT: 1 Corinthians 16:1-4  
PREACHER: Rev. Kim James  
OCCASION: October 14, 2018, at First UMC

### **INTRODUCTION**

On Friday and Saturday, the Los Angeles Dodgers and the Milwaukee Brewers played games one and two of their National League play-off series. Game three will be tomorrow, as those teams vie for an opportunity to play in The World Series. Since the Ogden Raptors are a farm team of the Los Angeles Dodgers, I decided I'd read up a bit on the Dodgers. I have to admit that I'm not normally someone who follows sports very closely, so you who are much more in tune with Major League Baseball will have to forgive me if I say this incorrectly. But, what I read seemed to indicate that the Dodgers won their way to the play-offs, in part at least, by using an offensive strategy called "platooning."

"Platooning" means that, during the regular season, the Dodgers increased their roster to 39 players instead of the more usual 25. Those extra numbers allowed them to possess two players for some positions, with one being a right-hander and the other a lefty. That way, the coach could use whichever batter (the right-hander or the left-hander) was better suited to get a hit off the opposing team's right or left-handed pitcher.

If I've understood this correctly, such large rosters aren't allowed in the play-offs. So, there's some question about the Dodgers' ability to win all the way to The World Series. But, as their coach said in September, the Dodgers were going to use every advantage they had in the regular season, and getting a lot of base hits was a really important strategy for winning.

Today, I want to talk to you about strategy. Last Sunday, as we began our own baseball-themed series, our emphasis was on the importance of stepping up to the plate by being ready and willing to share. This morning, with the help of 1 Corinthians 16, we'll see that we get a base hit when we move from that initial willingness of heart to an actual strategy for how we're going to do this. That's what the

Apostle Paul was coaching the Corinthians to do, and that's what we all need to do. In order to get a base hit, we need to make a plan for giving.

### **1—PLAN TO EARN INCOME**

What's going on in these four verses of 1 Corinthians 16 is that the traveling missionary Paul was planning to make a visit to Corinth some time in the future. When he would arrive, he wanted the Christians at Corinth to have already collected a sum of money for him to take to Jerusalem to help the Christians who were suffering there. Paul said he was giving the Corinthians the same instructions as he gave to the Christians in Galatia. Verse two contains those instructions about making a plan for giving.

The logical first step in Paul's instructions is that we should plan to earn income. Obviously, we can't give something we don't have. So, we need to begin at the beginning. We need to earn some money. For the younger ones of us who have jobs, earning an income means showing up, doing our work, and getting paid. We may not earn as much as we'd like, but we do earn something. And the more responsible we are, the higher quality of work we do, and the more initiative we take to learn advanced skills—the more likely we'll be to receive promotions and receive increases in compensation. For retired people, income is usually determined by what you've already earned in Social Security and pension payments. But it may be possible to increase those amounts by earning interest and dividends on investments. Some of us are also able to earn income through self-employment and hobby businesses.

For some Christians, the desire to give more to God through the church might mean seeking or continuing employment when you might not otherwise do so. Maybe you could scrape by on your spouse's paycheck or your Social Security or investment income. But maybe you'd like to be more generous to God through the church. That's the way my mom was. At first, she went to work to help my dad pay the mortgage and put food on the table. Then, she kept working so she could pay for my college room and board. Then, she kept working because she wanted to be able to contribute more

money to the church. At that time, my dad had just recently started attending church, and he was still what you might call “a reluctant giver.” Mom wanted to give more than Dad did, so she took care of the problem by earning her own income.

Whether we’re working, disabled, or retired, another way we can increase our income is by saving money. You know that old saying, “A penny saved is a penny earned.” When we save money by not buying all the latest everything, we earn money. When we clip coupons and remember to use them at the store, we earn money. When we shop sales instead of paying full price, we earn money. When we pay off our credit card bills in full every month and don’t have any finance charges, we can save huge amounts of money, and even earn money back on many of our cards.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, is often quoted as saying, “Earn all you can, save all you can, and give all you can.” Whether we earn money at a job or with investments or by saving on our costs, the first way to get a base hit is to earn income.

## **2—PLAN TO GIVE REGULARLY**

A second way the Apostle Paul was coaching the Corinthians and us is that we should plan to give regularly. We see this in verse two, where Paul instructs that we should set aside our offering “on the first day of every week.” Another way of saying that is, whenever we get paid—weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly—we should give right away, right off the top. Our giving to God through the church should be our first priority.

I’ve had some people who were new to our church ask me sometimes why there’s so little money being put into our First UMC offering plates. I have to explain to them that lots of us are signed up to give electronically. So we don’t put our tithes into the offering plate because we’ve already donated them directly from our bank accounts. That’s a really great way of putting God first, and I encourage you to sign up for electronic giving when you receive the form in the mail.

The down side of electronic giving is that what new people see is empty offering plates or plates that mostly contain coins and one dollar bills. The impression is that giving is a low priority here, and that the norm and expectation is haphazard giving. Fortunately that's not the case! The ministries of this church can't happen with only random giving, if and when people feel like they have a few extra bucks to spare. And who ever really has any extra money? All of us can easily spend every dollar and dime that we have. If we are going to get ourselves a base hit, we have to plan to give regularly.

### **3—PLAN TO GIVE PROPORTIONATELY**

The third step in our strategy is to plan to give "proportionately." I know you don't see that word in these verses, but that's part of the meaning of verse 2, which has been translated in different ways. In our NRSV pew Bibles, it says, "put aside and save whatever extra you earn." In the Common English Bible, it says, "set aside whatever you can afford from what you earn." And the New International Version says we should, "set aside a sum of money in keeping with [your] income." I like the clarity of that last translation best. Simply put, persons with small incomes are OK to give small amounts. People with middle incomes can give medium amounts. And persons who have larger incomes should give larger amounts.

While this all seems like common sense on one level, people don't always behave this way in real life. Have you ever known someone who had a sizeable income, but was still broke all the time? Maybe the mortgage on their "dream house" was more than they could really afford. Or maybe they had other debts—student loans, auto loans, recreational vehicle loans, and credit cards run amok. And then, of course, they felt like they had nothing "extra" to give away. Donating to the church was a luxury they didn't think they could "afford." In contrast, a person who earns much less, but is well-disciplined about spending only within their means, might be able to enjoy the peace of bills paid off and feel good about making a substantial contribution to the church each month.

By “proportionate giving,” I’m talking about numbers and percentages. You know how baseball is a game of statistics and numbers—scores, RBIs, batting averages, and all that? Well, we can also talk about numbers and statistics in our donations to God through the church. Social scientists tell us that the average American only gives about 2.5% of their income to charity. For Christians, most of that 2.5% goes to the church. But do you know what the Bible tells us we’re supposed to give? A tithe, which is 10%. I’m going to talk more about tithing in an upcoming week, so I won’t go into that so much now. But I want you to think about what percentage of your income you have been giving to God through the church. Is it 10%? Five percent? Three percent? Half a percent? Figure it out. Use a calculator, if necessary. How much did you give to the church last month? Divide that number by your monthly income. That’s your percentage or proportion of giving.

Whatever your percentage is, I encourage you to try to increase it. When you fill out your pledge card for 2019, consider increasing your percentage from 2% to 3% or from 5% to 6% or from 9% to 10%. Step out on faith that God will help you with this. It may seem really hard to imagine right now where that “extra” money will come from, but I believe that God will help you will find a way to gain more or spend less on other things so that you can experience the joy of giving to God through First United Methodist Church.

### **CONCLUSION**

Not all of us are good with finances and numbers, and talking about these details can be difficult. But if you’re going to make a base hit, you have to give this some thought. While a generous spirit and a willing heart might help us step up to the plate, winning takes more than that. It takes some statistical analysis and strategy. It takes a plan. So, let’s do as Paul suggests. Let’s plan to earn an income, let’s plan to give regularly, and let’s plan to give proportionately. We’re a lot more likely to follow through if we’re intentional. So let’s get a base hit. Let’s plan for giving.