



Five Challenges for Men

(www.mensgroup.org - "Original Study")

PRAY: Opening and Closing prayers are suggested for small group members or individuals to invite God into the study to seek Him in His Word. Feel free to add your own words in prayer.

Dear Lord, help us to understand Paul's challenges in the Scripture that reveal our role as godly men. We pray you will encourage and strengthen us to follow these commands for men so that we will live our lives as you intended.

INTRODUCTION:

From the locker room all the way to the board room, coaches to CEOs take time to encourage the men working with them. They know each man needs to stay focused when they step onto the court, field, or into their place of business. The challenges they receive from their leaders give them a clear picture of what is at stake and help them understand their responsibilities in it. These moments of encouragement create a higher possibility of success for all.

Here are a few concise statements of encouragement from sports and business leaders to men that can motivate them:

- "Capital isn't scarce. Vision is." –Sam Walton, CEO of Wal-Mart
- "The effectiveness of a leader is best judged by the actions of those he guides." –Bill Courtney, Assistant Coach, University of Miami
- "Growth and comfort do not coexist." –Ginny Rometty, CEO of IBM
- "It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you'll do things differently." –Warren Buffett, CEO of Berkshire Hathaway
- "Skill is only developed by hours and hours of work." –Usain Bolt, Olympic Gold Medalist
- "Nobody who ever gave his best regretted it." –George S. Halas, Head Coach, Chicago Bears
- "Successful people don't fear failure, but understand that it's necessary to learn and grow from." –Robert Kiyosaki, Businessman and Author

PURPOSE:

Why do these five commands that Paul wrote to the Corinthian church matter to me in the twenty-first century? Paul laid out the standard of life for any man who wanted to participate in leadership as an Elder or Deacon. The question then is, “Does this exempt all other men from meeting a standard to be a godly man?” The clear answer is, “No!” Here are the five commands from the Apostle Paul that we will be studying (1 Corinthians 16:13-14):

- Be on your guard.
- Stand firm in the faith.
- Be men of courage.
- Be strong.
- Do everything in love.

These five commands give us a glimpse into how Paul saw manliness in the church. They set a standard for believing men to live up to, no matter where they are in their faith journey. The purpose of this series is:

- To inform men that they are in a daily battle for their lives and must actively engage in protecting themselves against forces eager to guide them to destruction.
- To instruct men in how to recognize what they can do, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to live a life worthy of Christ’s sacrifice for them.
- To inspire men to live a life that produces fruit, dispels discouragement, and leads to victory in God’s personal plans for us.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

As a pastor/coach, Paul, the apostle, spent much time in Corinth, Greece, discipling and instructing an assembly of believers. Then, as he traveled to other places, he wrote letters back to them with more instruction on issues they had questions about. These included: marriage, divorce, moral and social purity, divisions among attendees, church discipline, idolatry, proper worship and the Lord’s Supper, spiritual gifts, and other practical advice, as well as doctrinal issues.

As Paul concluded his sixteen-chapter letter to Corinth, he told them he wanted “to come and stay a while” in the near future (1 Cor. 16:7). He also identified several other leaders ministering to believers with which he was working, including Timothy and Stephanas.

Then, with all the difficult and questionable issues addressed, and before he wrote his final goodbye, he challenged the church to a new kind of thinking about their behavior, by summarizing all the previous issues into five succinct statements. Paul said to his struggling Corinthian community: “Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love.” (1 Corinthians 16:13-14 NIV)

How can we understand what Paul said since it was over two thousand years ago? At that time the Greek language was used as the business language for the known world, much like English

is today. This lasted from about 400 B.C. to several hundred years after Christ. It was called Koine [or Common] Greek, not classical Greek, and was replaced by Latin which spread from the Roman Empire. Because the Koine Greek died out, it means that all original definitions of its words would not change, so we are confident that we know exactly the meaning of the words Paul used when he wrote to the Corinthians.

To fully understand the emphasis of these five challenging statements, it is helpful to review the Corinthian society. We have already listed topics he addressed with them, and to this we add a brief survey of the city of Corinth, Greece in the first century.

Corinth is a port city on the southwest side of the isthmus between the peninsula below it and mainland Greece above it. Much commerce flowed into its harbor from the west and was carried to the east side of the isthmus to continue to its destination in the east. Commerce arriving on the east side of the isthmus traveled across to depart from the port of Corinth for the west. The manufacturing of dyed cloth, pottery, and armor were significant businesses in Corinth and that, combined with other cargo passing through the isthmus and the city, created a powerful commercial spirit. Many residents became rich and lived luxurious and immoral lives. You might say it was a first-century Los Angeles, New York, or Paris.

Further, the city's population was deeply committed to idolatry with a large temple overlooking the city from Ziria Mountain which rose 1,750 feet above the sea. A major portion of the converts in the Corinthian church came from pagan backgrounds where there were deities tied to seasons, ceremonies of initiation, developed myths of the gods, pagan beliefs, and very little doctrine, but the ideas of salvation, redemption, and immortality were not the primary goal of their mystical experiences. It is suggested that Maia, one of the seven daughters of Atlas and Pleione, conceived a child with Zeus and gave birth to Hermes in a cave near lake Dasios on Mount Ziria. Sexual pleasure as a form of worship and offerings of the best kinds of meats were daily activities of this idolatrous city.

It would be difficult transitioning people from gods and myths to Jesus Christ as Savior without the power of the Holy Spirit breaking through the mysticism in which they indulged. The teachings of Christianity were a perpetual challenge for the church and its leaders as new believers were surrounded by immorality and idolatry of paganism.

The five challenges of "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love." (1 Corinthians 16:13-14 NIV) were significant challenges by Paul to overcome the Corinthian culture. Each challenge is addressed in the following lessons with several questions to help in their application to twenty-first-century men.

ASSIGNMENT:

A good way to start this lesson series is to review the next lesson and the "Additional Resources" verses.

Note: All verses are taken from the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible.

Lesson 1 – Be on Your Guard

Lesson Focus: Attention should be given to living the Christian life daily. A key element for men is their continual alertness to deception, idolatry, and the lure of immorality.

“Blessings abound for each one who keeps a close watch on how he lives and stays true to what is right for the sake of his own salvation and the salvation of those around him.” –C. Marsh Bull

Starting Prayer: *Dear Lord Jesus Christ, we believe in you and all that your word instructs us to do. Help us to understand the blessing of staying alert to temptation and being ever watchful of our testimony about you before others.*

Opening Questions:

1. When in your life has a coach, leader, pastor, wife, or friend confronted you with a comment or statement that challenged your thinking?

2. What did they say and how did you respond?

Scripture Passage: “Be on your guard” (1 Corinthians 16:13)

Story: David had been on the run from King Saul for several years hiding in different places when his current location in the wilderness of Ziph was betrayed to Saul by the Ziphites. Saul immediately traveled there with the intent of capturing and killing David. That night, Saul’s men slept in a ring with Saul and his commander, Abner, at the center. David and his friend Abishai snuck into the camp stepping over soldiers until they stood over Saul, sleeping like a baby. However, David would not kill Saul but took his spear and jug of water.

When they were a safe distance away, David shouted down and woke up Abner and said to him, “*You’re a man, aren’t you? And who is like you in Israel? Why didn’t you guard your lord the king? Someone came to destroy your lord the king. What you have done is not good. As surely as the Lord lives, you and your men must die, because you did not guard your master, the Lord’s anointed. Look around you. Where are the king’s spear and water jug that were near his head?*” (1 Samuel 26:15-16)

Challenge Explanation:

In 1 Corinthians 16:13, Paul writes four concise statements using military metaphors to capture the imagination of the reader and bring clarity to his meaning. The Corinthians lived under the Roman Empire’s heavy hand and soldiers were present every day in full array.

The first of the four statements is a command to keep watch, stay awake, and be alert. And this could be translated as “keep on doing what you are already doing. Don’t stop, continue.”

As we have already discussed, these believers were living in a hostile environment with many opportunities to be lured away from their new Savior. It was important for them to guard their life diligently, to make no allowances for sin, and not allow anyone to sneak up on them.

Paul was emphasizing, “don’t be careless, indifferent, or easily deceived, but be watchful as would a sentry who must stay alert, awake, and aware of his surroundings even at night when others would be sleeping.” A sentry’s punishment for not doing so could be the loss of his rank, court marshal, or even the loss of his life.

Discussion Questions:

1. If you have been in the military or are familiar with the military, in your own words how would you describe the challenge of being on guard?

2. David’s story was about when King Saul and Abner were caught off guard. Tell your story of a time you were caught off guard, and what was the result?

3. What other words would you use to characterize being on guard?

Application:

1. How would it look for your life to “be on guard” perpetually?

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2. If you were aware of this idea previously, in what ways are you presently “on guard?”

3. How well are you guarding your mind (what you think about), heart (what you feel), hands (what you pick up), feet (where you go), eyes (what you look at), and ears (what you listen to)?

4. What would you do next to implement the action of being on guard in your life?

Closing Prayer: *Father, we are aware that sin is all around us and that it seeks to draw us in and capture us in its web. Help us to be alert to sin’s temptations and help us to encourage others who also seek to be alert in their struggle to be victorious. Create in us a picture of what it would mean to guard our lives daily.*

Additional Resources:

Read similar “on guard” verses for a better understanding of this phrase: Proverbs 4:23; Proverbs 7:2; Malachi 2:15-16; Luke 12:15; Philipians 4:7; 2 Peter 3:17-18.

Lesson 2 – Stand Firm in the Faith

Lesson focus: We will make a distinction between being on your guard and standing firm. Both are recognized as important, but each have uniqueness in their application.

“Blessings on every man who is standing firm in the faith. May it bring confidence and joy to his life in Christ.” –C. Marsh Bull

Starting Prayer: *Dear Father, we want to stand firm in the faith. We want to understand what it means to do that, then put it into practice and never turn back from doing it. Help us to keep this promise to you.*

Opening Questions:

1. What would you imagine the root system of a mature tree to look like?

2. Why are deep and wide roots important?

3. When was the last time you stood up to someone else who was speaking untruths?

Scripture Passage: “Stand firm in the faith” (1 Corinthians 16:13)

Story: Peter wrote a letter to believers in Asia Minor [central Turkey today] to address the abuse and persecution they were continually experiencing. He encouraged them to endure and live holy lives in their cities. He told them to *“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”* And, *“I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.”* (1 Peter 5:8-9, 12) Peter is encouraging them to stand firm and stay in the battle, keeping focused on Jesus.

Challenge Explanation:

Besides the defensive stance of being “*on your guard*” noted in 1 Corinthians 16:13, Paul suggested a positive, engaged stance in the second admonition. He challenged them to “*stand firm*,” not sit or walk. He meant for them to keep on standing firm, the way they had begun.

The military emphasis would relate to a broad stance that helps you keep your balance in the battle. You don’t sit or lay down if you’re fighting. The picture is applied to our lives as we stand firm when the winds of circumstances and false doctrines blow on us. We stand facing the enemy, more than just on guard, we anticipate a battle, as Peter noted above in his comments. Paul encouraged the church to not waver, be uncertain, or doubtful which illustrated a lack of faith. He wanted them to grow deep roots so that they would be able to stand in the fight.

There is a second phrase in this command. It is the words “*in the faith*” which is not your personal faith or a faith which is not specific, but your relationship to a larger body of belief that is common to all believers, and which finds its roots in Christ Jesus. This is a challenge to believe by faith totally, live by it daily, and trust it for your eternity.

Many commentators have suggested that this part of the second challenge should be included in the other commands. If it was added to them, they would say, “Be on guard in the faith,” “Be courageous men in the faith,” “Be strong in the faith,” and “Do all things in love in the faith.”

Discussion Questions:

1. What is happening when in your spiritual life you find yourself sitting rather than standing?

2. How well can you hold your ground and defend the truths of the faith?

3. If you could rate your ability to stand firm on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being best and 1 being lowest, how confident are you in God’s ability to help you stand firm?

Application:

1. How deep are your roots in the faith?

2. In what area are you not standing firm? How could you bring back its integrity?

3. What would you suggest to grow your spiritual roots deeper and wider?

4. What would you suggest to grow your spiritual roots deeper and wider?

Closing Prayer: *God, thank you for all you have done and are doing and will do in my life. Help me to deepen my roots in the faith and get more serious about standing firm every day.*

Additional Resources:

Read similar “stand firm” verses for a better understanding of these two words together: Isaiah 7:9; Ezekiel 13:5; 1 Corinthians 15:58; 2 Corinthians 1:21, 24; Ephesians 6:13-14; Philippians 1:27; 2 Thessalonians 2:15.

Lesson 3 – Be Men of Courage

Lesson Focus: We will be reviewing what it takes to be a man of courage.

“You are blessed when you take courage and believe that God is all that He says He is and that He gives life and breath to everything, and He satisfies every need.” –C. Marsh Bull

Starting Prayer: *Father God help us to understand through this lesson how to become men of courage and help us to use that courage to tell the truth about your Kingdom.*

Opening Questions:

1. In what way is the word “courage” used in our nation?

2. What do you think is the opposite of courage?

Scripture Passage: “Be men of courage” (1 Corinthians 16:13)

Story: King Asa was the first of the good kings of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. He led a revival of the people early in his reign after he heard the message of Azariah the prophet that *“the Lord is with you when you are with Him!”* (2 Chronicles 15:2) *“When Asa heard these words and the prophecy of Azariah son of Oded the prophet, he took courage. He removed the detestable idols from the whole land of Judah and Benjamin and from the towns he had captured in the hills of Ephraim.”* (2 Chronicles 15:8) He also repaired the altar of the Lord in the Temple. He was a man of courage, confronting people for their idolatry and directing them back to God.

Challenge Explanation:

Paul was a prominent leader, along with several other men, of the church at Corinth but it wasn't these leaders that created the problems the church was experiencing. It was its participants who were selfish, acted like infants, and called for loyalty to only specific leaders. Further, these people were not addressing the sinful actions within the church that Paul wrote about in earlier chapters. The church people were staining their reputation before the city.

Here, in the third of the five challenges, we see a slight adjustment to its meaning. “Be men of courage” was the challenge for the church to start acting this way, which they had not been doing before. This is different than in the first and second challenges where they were already, to some extent, on guard and standing firm.

Paul wanted them to start acting like men of courage and operate this way with ongoing regularity. They were no longer to be cowardly, timid, or afraid of their enemies, but act like a mature man would act, being bold and brave, facing head-on what was necessary to confront.

It was time for these people to exhibit bravery and unflinching courage which is characteristic of real men. Real men speak up, call a spade a spade, listen more than they speak, and exhibit love that everyone can see. Paul was challenging them to move toward maturity, taking on the responsibilities as men that they should have taken on already.

Discussion Questions:

- 1. What seemed to be the reasons for Paul to charge the church to act mature?

- 2. How was the manliness of a man described?

- 3. What was happening to the church because men weren't acting like men?

Application:

- 1. What do you think are characteristics of a man of courage?

- 2. What would you change to personally portray those characteristics?

3. What would you do next to implement the action of being a man of courage?

Closing Prayer: *Father God, you set the example for the good traits of a man because you are the one who created us and gave those traits to us. Thank you for Paul's forthrightness and help each one of us make the changes necessary to be a man of courage.*

Additional Resources:

Read similar "courage" verses for a better understanding of this word: David challenges to be brave and courageous (Psalm 27:14); King Hezekiah's courage (2 Chronicles 32:5-8); Joshua's courage (Joshua 1:6-9; 10:22-26); Jesus challenged his disciples to "take courage! I am here!" (Matthew 14:27; Mark 6:5); "We are God's house. We keep our courage and remain confident in our hope in Christ" (Hebrews 3:6).

Read *The Map, The Way of All Great Men* by David Murrow.

Lesson 4 – Be Strong

Lesson Focus: It's about God's strength being applied to our lives so that we can be strong.

"May God give you the power to accomplish all the good things your faith prompts you to do."
–C. Marsh Bull

Starting Prayer: *God I pray that you would allow all the men working through this lesson to understand what it means to grow strong in their spiritual life and be leaders of their families. I pray your Spirit will build strong men to help their churches and encourage other men.*

Opening Questions:

1. How is the word "strong" used in our culture?

2. What are ways our culture tries to convince us that physical strength is the measure of a man?

Scripture Passage: "Be strong" (1 Corinthians 16:13)

Story: Paul spoke about many things both doctrinal and practical in the book of Ephesians. He loved this church and spent much time and effort making sure it received a good start and had capable leadership for the people to follow. He usually had a final reminder at the end of his letters, and Ephesians is no different.

After completing his discussion on Spirit-guided relationships in Ephesians 5:21-6:4, he said, "*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power.*" (Ephesians 6:10) After this, he laid out the seven parts of the armor of God which were to be worn. The preface is important to understand because there is a big difference between merely putting on the armor without having God's mighty power compared to doing so "*in His mighty power.*"

Challenge Explanation:

In the fourth challenge to the church at Corinth, the two words "be strong" were used. He was not referring to being strong physically, rather it was a challenge to start strengthening themselves spiritually and included the additional idea of being mighty in the Lord. These words suggest the fact that they could not do this on their own, they needed the Spirit of God and the men around them to help each other be strong and mighty in God.

This strength would be active rather than just possessed but never put into action. This was not the exercising and building up of spiritual muscles just to lay around and do nothing with them. It was maturing to the place they could use their strength to further the cause of Christ. Earlier, Paul wrote to them about growing into maturity, he said, *“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.”* (1 Corinthians 13:11)

He wanted them to grow up in all areas of their life, to spend time in God’s Word, seek to understand what they were reading, create ways to be an example to others, make hard decisions, and be disciplined, as every man would be if he wanted to win in a sport. He wanted them to do mighty acts through the strength they received from God.

Said another way, show strength in your actions and be a victorious overcomer as you live your life. So, in challenge three, it was to be brave and courageous in your faith, and here it went one step further to being mighty and victorious.

Discussion Questions:

1. We do not grow in every aspect of our lives at the same pace, some parts of us are less mature than others. What area(s) of life are you still working on to catch up to the rest?

2. What do you think it would look like to do mighty things for God?

Application:

1. How are you seeking to be strong in your life?

2. What do you think would help you to grow more mature in your faith?

3. What would you do next to implement the action of being strong?

Closing Prayer: *Father we know that it is hard to be strong as believers, but we are thankful that you are the one who brings strength to us. Help us to recognize this gift and allow free rein of your strength in all areas of our lives.*

Additional Resources:

Read similar “be strong” verses for a better understanding of this phrase: Psalm 31:24; Isaiah 35:4; Daniel 10:19; Haggai 2:4-5; Romans 1:11, 15:1-4; 2 Corinthians 12:10, 13:9; 2 Timothy 2:1; 1 John 2:14.

Lesson 5 – Do Everything In Love

Lesson Focus: Help us to understand that agape love is key and baseline for all believers. Although there are four commands by Paul previous to this command to love, we are to operate always out of love in all we do.

“Blessings on each one of you who have studied with us through this series. Integrate these five statements into your memory then out through your heart and hands and you will be blessed.”
–C. Marsh Bull

Starting Prayer: *Holy Spirit, help us to dive deep into our hearts to see your love for us and help us to spread it within our church, neighborhood, and out to unbelievers in our world. Fill us with your love every day.*

Opening Questions:

1. “Agape” love is the highest form of love, which is pure, holy, and totally dedicated to the object of the love. Who would you say “agape” loves you?

2. When was the last time, outside of your family, that you told someone else you “agape” loved them?

Scripture Passage: “Do everything in love” (1 Corinthians 16:14)

Story: Jesus will be crucified on a cross the next day, and yet he spent the evening with his disciples. He promised them the Holy Spirit would be with them soon. He confirmed himself as the vine with all of them being the branches. He helped them see how great his love for them was when he said, “*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.*” (John 15:9). That’s a powerful love.

Then, he gave them a commandment in addition to the Ten Commandments, “*My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.*” (John 15:12-13)

Challenge Explanation:

The four preceding commands of 1 Corinthians 16:13 were directed against the Corinthians’ carelessness, capriciousness, childishness, and moral weakness. From this platform, Paul presents his fifth and last command.

This challenge to “do everything in love” meant the church was to participate in the results of the action, they were to love each other. “Everything” is an all-inclusive word that leaves no permission where love does not have to be shown.

The second powerful word in this command is love. In English, we have one word for love. But in the Greek language, there are three: eros (sexual love), phileo (brotherly love), and agape (the highest form of love, which is pure, holy, and totally dedicated to the object of the love). Paul is saying let everything you do be wrapped in the highest form of love, “agape.”

Just three chapters earlier, Paul wrote defining the content of love. The last verse of that chapter captures Paul’s final point. “*And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*” (1 Corinthians 13:13) Why is love the greatest of the three? Simply put, faith will one day become sight for we shall see Christ as he is. Hope is not wishful thinking but deferred waiting for the promises of God to become a reality in the future. Yet, love is the greatest because it will continue, otherwise, we would not be able to spend eternity with God. His love is the permanent cord that keeps us connected to Him.

So, what was Paul commanding in 1 Corinthians 16:14? It was that the commands of verse 13, be on your guard, stand firm in the faith, be men of courage, and be strong, are good and essential to our Christian life, but keeping them as commands necessitates a heart dedicated to God’s love. It is not to be done out of duty or dread, but to be enacted through devotion to God because of the love He has bestowed upon us. Doing everything in love softens the way men respond in each of the first four commands. It is the compassion that infills the watchfulness, firmness, manliness, and strength we are challenged to do by Paul.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the significance of Paul attaching command five to the first four?

2. What is it about “agape” love that makes it the highest form of love?

Application:

1. How do you express gratitude to God for His “agape” love given to you?

2. What are the best ways, considering the way God created you, to show “agape” love to others?

3. How can “agape” love shown to others change the way people respond to you?

Closing Prayer: *Holy Spirit, teach us to be a giver of agape love to our closest friends and those farthest away from us. Help us to exhibit this love of God to those who cross our path and to those who are on the same path as us.*

Suggested Additional Resources:

Read similar “do everything in love” verses for a better understanding of this phrase: Matthew 5:43-48; John 14:28-29, 31; Romans 5:5, 8; Ephesians 5:5-8; 1 John 2:15; 4:7-5:3.

SUMMARY

In the 1960s when I was first learning to drive a car, a small device could be attached to the motor to keep the car from traveling too fast. It was called a governor. I remember pushing down on the gas pedal to go faster and having the device resist because I had reached the top of the governor's allowance. Today, it is called a car speed limiter and is used to prevent teen drivers from driving too fast. It allows parents to program a top speed that is unable to be exceeded. Governors are used to protect life.

Love is a governor of life which is here to help you to (1.) be on your guard, (2.) stand firm, (3.) be a man of courage, and (4.) be strong in your life.

These four actions provide direction and purpose in life, and should all be done (5.) "in love." No one does well without them, and no one can achieve them without God in their heart and by their side.

Spend time in your group, or by yourself, deciding how to enact these five commands in your life on a daily basis. When you learn to achieve them with God in your heart and by your side, there are no limits to what you can do for Him.

Are any of Paul's five commands not present in your life? Which one(s)?

Do any have a limited presence in your life, except maybe only with your family and closest friends?

How could you impartially expand to everyone in your city the action of loving with agape love?

All our Blessings,

Men's Group Foundation, Inc.

A mensgroup.org "Third Party Original Study"

Written by Richard Matteson

Rmattesonrealty@gmail.com

214-690-6662