

One of things I have learned from coaching soccer is that people can have a hard time realizing their potential together. They may see what they excel in, but have a hard time demonstrating it together. Every other person is the one who needs to do something different. We more easily see what others need to do. When we are challenged to improve or change we become discouraged and resentful and shut down. We are hesitant to take what God gives us and to share it.

Paul begins our scripture passage by pointing out that the Corinthians excel in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in eagerness, and in love. He then challenges them to excel in a generous undertaking (literally overflowing grace.) They are challenged to take all they excel in and to demonstrate it together. Their challenge is to give money.

We excel too. Our church has trusted God through good times and in bad times. We have strong belief in Jesus Christ. Our church has many members who communicate God's word, by teaching our children and by speaking the message in the congregation. Our church excels in knowledge. There are people with expertise from many professions. There are those among us who have a deep knowledge of the Bible. We know that God is with us and among us. If that is not enough, our church has enthusiasm, eagerness to learn, to care for each other, to do what God wants us to do in the world. All of this is supported by the love of God seen in the love and caring which infuses our church.

We are a group of people who believe God's overflowing grace. We talk about his overflowing grace. We know the significance of his overflowing grace. We desire to show his overflowing grace to others. We are motivated to show his overflowing grace by love.

Now we need to demonstrate his overflowing grace. Since together we excel in all of these ways, we can excel in demonstrating our faith through giving our time, money, and talents. Sometimes when we hear the church challenge us to give money or our time we shut down and are even resentful. Why don't they see what I do? We do. The challenge is not to be content with what we do. The challenge is not just to participate, but to excel in offering our selves and our money and our time in service to others.

Excellence in giving demonstrates the genuineness of our love for God and for each other. We can't command excellence in giving from each other. We can't force love to happen. Paul does not command the people to give. He says that giving tests the genuineness of your love. Genuine love, true love doesn't leave us content with words (or knowledge of that love, or desire to express the love.) We

must act. Without hesitating we use our talents to write a love poem, our money to give a gift, our time to demonstrate our love. One can say I thought of doing that, or wanted to do something, or they know I would do that, but did anything actually happen. Giving is a concrete act of love.

You may say our church gives enough; I demonstrate love by giving. Paul asks us to look at each other's examples, "the earnestness of others giving." He holds up another church who gave voluntarily, even beyond their means. We can be moved to take action, to demonstrate God's grace by giving, as we see others act. My son will sometimes do something he moments before didn't want to do (set the table) when he knows his sister will do it. Our demonstration of love through giving motivates each other. Does our giving match up to others who give earnestly, without hesitating?

Comparison with others may not move us to demonstrate our love for God by the overflowing grace of giving. Paul is ready. How about Jesus? God gives his overflowing grace without hesitation to us in Jesus Christ. Christ was rich, yet became poor. He gave to us so that we who were poor might be rich. Jesus did more than bring faith, talk about salvation, know our need for relationship with God, desire for us to be saved, or love us. Jesus demonstrated his love in that he came from heaven and gave his life so that we are able to be with God. We are saved from the poverty of our sins by his act of giving.

We are to give without hesitation. God's grace and generosity truly experienced in our lives will be reflected in our generosity. The joy of receiving God's gift leads to giving freely. We give back to God together through the ministry of Bell Memorial. We offer our time, our money, and our talents as a demonstration of our love others can see and experience. I could say that our church needs money to maintain and expand ministry. That is true, but need alone is not a reason to give. We give because God made available the gift of acting out among ourselves the love we see and experience in Jesus Christ.

The Corinthians with enthusiasm began to give without hesitating, yet later needed Paul's challenge to finish their generous undertaking. It is hard work carrying through on our giving. We get stalled if we forget why we are giving. (That's why when we don't come to church our giving to the church drops.) We also get stalled when we let having the intention to give be enough. (I often stop praying before I am going on a retreat, because I intend to pray more later.)

One way this comes out is we lowball our giving. We tend to be conservative in commitment to giving money and our time. We only give if we are sure it will not inconvenience us in a worse case scenario. We intend to give more later. What ends up happening is that we don't go beyond this low estimate, even if we are able to later.

Paul says, “For if eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.” We are challenged to have our desire to give matched by action. Together we give with intention, according to our means, not hesitating, without running out of energy. God demonstrates his love through us as we give our time and money to the church to enable service to others. We will not be judged by what we couldn’t give, but by what we didn’t give.

There was a father who gave lavish gifts to his son who lived with his ex-wife. This father who appeared so generous to the child failed to pay child support. He was willing to give ‘big ticket’ items like bikes and video game systems, yet he failed to offer support for the more mundane but necessary features of life – like food, clothing, and shelter. He was taken to court and chastised by the judge, who commented that his self-gratifying gifts to the boy did not feed or care for him in important and fundamental ways.¹

Giving has an immense significance in the life of our church. [ways we give] It demonstrates God at work in us. Giving is about sharing our lives with one another. Giving is not about making us feel good, giving if the church does what we want. We do not give in a way that makes us comfortable. We do not give so others/we can live at ease!! We give without hesitating so others will see and experience God’s love through our church.

Giving can keep us from having too much. Materialism is an impediment to deep spiritual life. Giving focuses us on our dependence on God for all that we have. Giving can keep others from having too little. Giving makes you a part of God’s plan for the future he has for our church. We join together in sharing our time, talents, and money in order to serve those in our community and in the world to whom God is calling us. One reason to hesitate may be, we have our own financial problems. Giving money will burden us. We don’t give so we will need financial support, but to share the financial burden. So all may participate freely in the way God is calling them. We can do more together.

We give without hesitating because of our desire for spiritual excellence. We give without hesitating because of the example of others. We give without hesitating because of the example of Christ. We give without hesitating to complete the giving we have already begun. We also give without hesitating so that we and others may share the love of Jesus. Our individual giving reflects our way of life. Our giving as a church reflects who we are. Do you follow Jesus? Are we part of the Body of Christ?

¹ Mosser, David N., *The Stewardship Companion*, 134