

Last week with the Corinthians we received the challenge to give money, a generous gift. We are to give without hesitating to demonstrate God's overflowing grace. Giving of money, time and talents is proof of our love.

This giving begins with God. He gives us steadfast love, overflowing grace in Jesus Christ. He gives us all that we have our time, our money, and our talents. God moves us to give this all in service to each other in the church in order that those outside the church may be served. He puts in our hearts the eagerness to give. But we must take the initiative to give.

Paul and Titus had eagerness put in their hearts by God to serve the Corinthian church. Paul and Titus gave time and energy to the Corinthians. They gave of themselves not to get money or get the Corinthians to use their time to enhance Paul and Titus' ministry. They were eager that the Corinthians their faithfulness. They want God's people to be a part of God's kingdom. They want God's people to show that they are a part of what he is doing in the world. Giving of our time, talents, and money proves our faithfulness and connects us into God's preferred future. God moves us to give eagerly of our time both to engage in ministry and to help others engage in ministry.

We hear that three men respond to God's call and give their time to support the Corinthians in their challenge to give. There is Titus and two other brothers who are eager to serve. These men give their time to facilitate the ministry of the church. These men were commended because of how they gave their time. Titus was not only eager to go help with the collection, but willing to give time to travel to Corinth (300 miles over mountainous terrain, or sea voyage.) The other brother's identities were defined by telling what they did for the church: preaching, administering the sharing of resources, helping others be motivated to give, supporting leadership, connecting churches together. In this case they gave their time to help the church's monetary giving be consistent with the gospel.

Our enthusiasm, our eagerness to give our time in any way, in multiple ways to serve God is testimony of God at work. Giving time doesn't necessarily take more "time "; rather it requires a shift in one's mindset. Everyone can give our lived out commitment to Jesus. We give our time to serve God in the midst of life, in trials (like sickness, business, caring for own family). We give our time to serve God in prosperity. This can encourage others to join in giving. God is asking you to prove your love for him by giving your time to serve him.

We give for the glory of the Lord and to show goodwill. Our giving at its heart is not for us but for what God wants. Giving our time shows our commitment to Jesus. Our giving shows others that God is at work in us. We

show others that we care for them by giving our time money and talents. We show others that God is at work among us as we give our time, money, and talents.

We want to do what is right not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of others. What does our church do with what we give? The church is us. What do we do as God's people with what we give? Paul did not encourage giving to line his pockets or to look good among other church leaders. We are not trying to give to look good or to have more, but to be faithful to the ministry God has called us to together. We try to do what is right with what is given of time, money, and talents. We pay staff, maintain a building, enable ministry and mission to those in the church and those outside the church.

We must give our time to keep our monetary giving focused. Giving time makes us into an active church. It makes our monetary contributions worthwhile. There are many churches with lots of money, a big building, and empty pews. If we believe God wants our church to have new members we need to give our time to be in relationship with others not yet in the church. If we want to teach our children we need to give time to teach. If we want to grow in faith we need to give time to come and learn. If we don't give time to each other and to share ministry together we get disconnected and feel that people are just taking our money. We feel we have no stake in what others decide to do. [This is one reason our congregation is sending me to Sudan, not just sending money.]

We give trusting God to do great things and praying for his direction in our use of what we give. God has done great things with what you have given and will do more great things with what you give through Bell Memorial. Consider our Proverbs reading, a life lived trusting in riches or lived holding back our time for ourselves leads to withering, suffering, and want. This way brings a curse. On the other hand trusting in God and giving freely leads to flourishing and growing richer. This way brings blessing.

When we give of our time like Titus and the two brothers we are the glory of Christ. Wow. When we give we are the glory of Christ! Every aspect of life is changed by Jesus' love for us and our love for him. So give proof of this love. Show openly before others your love for God and your love for each other.

Love for Jesus does not involve false pretentious giving. Love is not self-serving. Love is giving that demonstrates our relationship with one another. Love is giving that demonstrates our desire for relationships with others. Giving is the tangible reflection of God's love effected in us through Christ Jesus. Giving demonstrates love and new life.

"The minute my mom gets invited to a baby-shower, she'll start knitting two receiving blankets -- one for the child to be born, and another one as an anonymous gift for an unknown newborn in an underprivileged neighborhood. Practically every mom who receives the baby-shower gift, with a handwritten story about the

fate of the twin-blanket, is in tears. And so is my mom. Yes, you can buy a blanket from the store, but when you've spent your own time, when you have spent hours wishing well for a child the world hasn't even seen, it create a deep strand of connection that is fulfilling for both the receiver and the giver.”

In our eagerness to prove our love for God we want others to join in giving. Giving money, time and talent is what makes us a part of Christ's body. In chapter nine we are encouraged that our eagerness, willingness to give motivates others. We effect others giving by our attitude towards it. Corinthians were ready to give which motivated Macedonians to give which motivates the Corinthians to actual giving.

The flip side is that we need to give or face shame. Giving through the church shows our connection and joins us together in common ministry. Giving also joins us with those who will receive gift. Giving time is what forms friendships, faith, shares God's word. Giving to others, with others, without hesitating or flaming out is a reason for Paul to boast. If we are not giving are we a church? Are we ready to fulfill the promise that has been voluntarily assumed by each of us in our confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? With Paul I say be ready to give and give. I don't want us forced into grudgingly contributing what we should, but rather giving a gracious voluntary offering that proves our love for Jesus to each other and to the world.