

It's not easy to stay focused. Average attention span is shrinking rapidly. Seven percent of people can't remember their own birthday from time to time. Videos people watch on the internet last an average of two and a half minutes. Email gets our attention an average of thirty times an hour, but of course pulls us away from whatever else we were working on. Short attention spans mean a goldfish pays attention longer than you on average. It also means by now some of you have already started thinking about something else.

Motivated people pay attention longer. If we pay for a ticket at the movie theater we can watch a whole two hours without picking up our phones. If there's a big football or basketball game we can enjoy the game over three hours without needing to plan the groceries or driving schedule for the week. Motivation can mean attention.

That goes for giving too. Christmas motivates us to give presents. When someone accomplishes something that motivates us to give them cards of recognition and congratulations. And when the cause is right, the heart strings are pulled, and we get emotionally attached to a cause we'll open up the wallet and give a financial contribution. Is giving in the church so motivated? It's a topic many don't like. Move on quick. You'll lose people if you talk about money in church. Giving and church are not mutually exclusive. They go together. For people who claim to be One in Christ giving and church must go together. As we look further into the second lesson we find that if we're...

Motivated by grace we excel in giving
Encouraged by example
Expressing thankfulness

If Kevin Durant walked into church to make a donation of \$10,000 it would be amazing. Some would smile wide, seek an autograph, or just sit in stunned silence. But no one would question whether or not Durant could afford to give \$10,000. His contract to play basketball is way more than that. He can afford pretty much whatever he wants. But if a homeless person walked in and wanted to donate \$100 we might question whether they could. That was the Macedonian churches Paul mentioned. They were poor and experiencing severe trials. And yet they gave.

The Macedonians' hearts were right. While others might have viewed donating as something being done, being given and lost, they didn't. God gave to them first. That was God's grace. It motivated them to excel in giving. **"We want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability."** Giving was only possible by God's grace. It was joyful because they gave from hearts right before God. They received a free gift and it motivated them to give physical and material offerings with eagerness.

Examples for giving are all around us. But our sinful nature takes examples and makes them faulty reasons for giving, false motivations. Pride sees how much someone else gives and wants to give to be better than them. Self-righteousness wants to claim that by giving I'm showing how much I love God and therefore how much God can love me. Guilt figures that I better put something in the plate as it passes because people will see and figure I'm just being cheap. Pressure from others mounts against us as we know they're giving and maybe we're not. That pressure leads to guilt which motivates giving that goes through the motions, gives by extraction, prying money out of bank accounts by force. That's not the right attitude or motivation. That's not eagerness to give.

We need better than examples. We first need a Savior. Our King for all eternity had wealth no earthly king could dream of. Everything was his. Until he decided to set it aside. Jesus gave up access to the heavenly bank account. He cut himself off from using the riches of being God. **"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."** In a great switch Jesus gave up his riches so that those riches might be given to you. He took on the poverty of your sins. He took them all on himself so that he was considered sinful and poor. He carried those to the cross. You avoided the cross and now you avoid eternal death too. You have become rich in ways you could never have dreamed. Like a king, you have wealth that is given by the King of kings.

After he sends a Savior God gives examples too. Good solid examples of giving God's way. People with hearts bought back in the same payment of Christ on the cross. Examples like the Macedonian churches. Poverty stricken churches full of believers just eager to give. They had every reason not to give. But **"entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints."** Paul maybe said they shouldn't, but they gave anyway. They pleaded to be able to give. They wanted to share in giving offerings to help others, to serve the saints, and to give to the Lord.

By God's grace that same attitude of giving is inside you. You are an example of excelling in giving because of God's love for you. You model for your children what it means to give the first and best to the Lord when they see you filling out offering envelopes with joy even though bills for Christmas presents and Thanksgiving food are coming in. Children, you come up with ideas for volunteering or giving to those less fortunate and model an eager heart willing to sacrifice to serve others. Living in God's love you willingly live with less so that giving to the Lord's work might be more. As Christians you give major gifts to church even though your tax preparer tries to talk you out of it.

Those are examples of single-minded focus. Generosity that baffles peoples' minds. Giving even when there would be reason to save. Giving with joy. Giving regularly without missing even in tough times. No pressure, no pride, no punishment. Grace motivated gospel driven giving. Exceling in the grace of giving by expressing thanks.

Thankful giving is already happening. Since January people in our church body all over the United States have given over \$500,000 to Christian Aid and Relief for food relief in Malawi, earthquake assistance in Nepal, and projects stateside too. Just a couple years ago that group was in Moore helping out with tornado relief. Various ministries we share as a national church body have seen God's people give \$12.8 million dollars for God's grace to be shared. Here in our own congregation we committed ourselves just last Sunday to giving \$12,600 in the coming year to the work we do collectively as a church body. That's ten percent of the total given that we give as a congregation to the shared work of our church body.

Beyond that we're being asked to consider another way in which to serve the saints. Our church body would like to retire a \$4.7 million dollar debt by the end of June 2016. In seven years we've already eliminated \$18 million. If that debt is wiped out imagine the ministry that could be added. New mission starts like what our district has experienced with Grace in Norman, Fulshear TX outside of Houston, Tyler TX in eastern Texas. Maybe even places like Edmond, Piedmont, or Yukon are next. We could be the next group of Christians to look to start a new mission and say, "Why not here, why not us?" The Macedonians were eager to give from poverty. Let God's grace motivate us to not limit ourselves, but be eager to give more so more can be done. No matter what God will ensure more people hear of his good news through us.

Not just nationally but locally let's stop and be thankful for what your offerings have done. In 2015 you will have given over \$125,000 to conduct ministry in NW Oklahoma City. This facility for worship is maintained from that amount. Over six thousand dollars were spent specifically with outreach in mind last year. You utilized this space for welcoming groups like the homeschooling COOP, YMCA soccer, and the neighborhoods for HOA meetings. You provide a website, Facebook page, and now a new sign in the new year to better advertise and get our name out to the community. You regularly send out almost 2000 postcards at Christmas and Easter to invite people to hear the good news. You hand out 2500 bags filled with information about our church at the 4th of July parade. God's grace motivated eagerness to do all this and more.

You could come up with reasons not to give. Will I have my job in a couple of months? If I give some to church how will I cover groceries or utilities? The housing market might go up or down and I need to sell soon so I can't give up liquid cash. God conquered all those reasons by his grace so that you might excel in giving. Forgiveness for all sins is yours. Peace with God is yours. Boldness to come before God is yours. You have a living hope in a living Savior who is King of all. He was rejected by men and was beaten, mocked, whipped, and nailed to a cross. Jesus Christ, his grace, that's your reason to give even in the face of reasons not to.

I give thanks for your eager willingness to give. You give thanks too. If you're not currently giving, hear the grace of God, the forgiveness Christ Jesus wins for you. Then with no guilt or pride or fear consider how you might give. Don't think about hitting a certain number. Don't worry if the amount isn't as high as you want now. Give with joy and eagerness to respond to God's love. If you're giving, hear the grace of God, the love God has for you. Then with no guilt or pride or fear consider how you might excel in giving with thankfulness. God isn't checking your income versus giving percentage. God wants your heart and in Christ he's already got it. The money you have, it's his. You can't lose. You can only gain as you participate in giving under God's grace assured of his providing and protection. The Savior motivates your giving. **"If the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have."**

So bring your attention back if it's been lost. Get focused. Find a single-minded focus in giving. Give because God's grace provides the motivation. Give because God's grace leads you to give. It's God's grace motivating you to excel in giving.