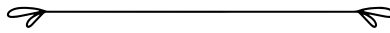


gift



I'll start off with a confession: I never got around to setting aside some time to complete this devotional. My life and mind have been so chaotic lately, it's left me scatterbrained. Trying to juggle family, work, church, and friends on interrupted sleep and extra stress have left me staring at this Coram Deo entry on my to-do list for an entire month without making any progress on it. I sat down multiple times to try and write this but for whatever reason, whenever I tried, the time was cut short by a more pressing need, or my mind was still racing from other activities and failed to focus on the task at hand.

But through all that craziness, God still does great things. Ever since this verse was assigned to me a month ago, it hasn't left my head. It's not always at the forefront but it's swimming back there somewhere, floating in my subconscious. And in the month since I was assigned this passage, it always felt like amid the chaos, the Holy Spirit kept finding a way to insert this verse and make me reflect, at least momentarily, on what it means for me and my relationship with God. So I apologize to all the readers who might have been looking for one long coherent reflection. Instead, I present to you, the first Coram Deo listicle:

- Being a steward of God's grace: A couple of weeks ago, Pastor John was giving a sermon about the brother of the prodigal son and how his initial reaction was to complain about how the father embraced this son who had done nothing for him. It got me thinking: isn't this the attitude that I also take when I dutifully serve others, be it at church or in the workplace, and I don't get the "credit" or "praise" that I'm due? While I may already know in my head why this is the wrong reaction, this verse really punched the point home. Verse 10 says that we are to "serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace." What does it mean to be a steward of God's grace? It's to be the caretaker of an asset and utilize it in a way that pleases the owner. In this case the asset we've been tasked with managing is grace: a gift to someone that is not deserved without any expectation of reward or repayment. Isn't this exactly what Jesus did for us?
- God's gifts to us are an invitation to participate in His work: In February, I ordered some snow shovels for my kids, Jonah and Micah. I've always cleaned the snow by myself, but I realized that I would love to be able to do that together with my kids. As it turns out, my kids wanted to do it with me too!... until Jonah got frustrated that shoveling snow required a bit of technique, so he ran inside frustrated, and Micah started eating the snow that had fallen in the front yard. I continued to shovel the snow and while it got done, I enjoyed the moments when Jonah and Micah were doing it with me. And it wasn't because Jonah and Micah were particularly good at it. It was because I was getting to do something I loved and achieve what I had set out to do with the people I loved. And the people I loved were doing things with the gifts I had gotten them to help me achieve my goal because they truly loved spending time with me. When we don't utilize the gifts that God gives us, this doesn't mean that God is not going to be able to achieve His plans. All we're doing is cheating ourselves of the opportunity to participate in what God is doing here on Earth. I believe in a God that can do the things He wants to with or without me. I want to participate in His work because I love Him, not because it won't get done if I'm not there to help. And if my heart was so full from my boys' willingness to help me with the gifts I had gotten them for such a short time, how much more would it please our Heavenly Father?

- "You're more than just your gift": One tired Saturday, I was home alone with Micah and because I'm such a great dad, I let him watch the TV for over an hour. Micah has really been in to "Encanto" lately, so I turned it on for Micah and used half of my brain power to watch, while the other half tried to relax. But near the end of the movie, the main character, Mirabel, sings something to her family that caught my attention: "You're more than just your gift." For those that haven't seen the movie, (SPOILER ALERT) many of the characters are struggling from the pressure and expectations that are put on them because of the gifts that they have been endowed. One feels like she must be perfect so she can be married away. Another feels like she's carrying the burdens of the entire town due to her super strength. But Maribel lets them see that their gift isn't what defines them. I think many of us can sometimes feel burdened by our gifts. We believe we have to live up to other people's expectations based on what we can provide, or we think that the only way for us to show that we love God is by utilizing our gifts. But God didn't give us these gifts to put pressure on us or for us to prove our love for Him. He gave it to us so we can reflect the love and grace He's already given to us to the people in our circles of influence. And God doesn't love us because of our gift: He gave us gifts because he loves us. Don't let your gifts be a burden that defines you.

My final request for each of you who may read this entry today is to reflect upon the gifts that God has given you. Whether it's praise, hospitality, administration, or one of many others, think about how you've felt about the gifts God has given you. Have they felt like a burden? Have you felt like you needed to use them to prove your love to God? Have you felt like you deserve something for using them? Or have you neglected them completely?

Whatever the case may be, my prayer for you is this:

1. That your relationship with God would be at the forefront, not the things that you do for Him or others.
2. That you would ask Him to show you how to utilize your gifts to gracefully serve the people who make up the community that surround you.