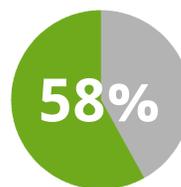


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Working with the manifold...



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SUPPORT PLEDGED



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I was a teenager in the Golden Age of what were called “muscle cars.” America’s love with the automobile was in full bloom. OPEC already existed, but the oil embargo of the early 1970s was far over the horizon, beyond what we could see. I’m sure *somebody somewhere* paid attention to “miles per gallon,” but not teenage boys in Southern California, who could buy gasoline for twenty-five cents a gallon. We cared about power. Horsepower. GTOs, Chargers, Camaros, Mustangs, Roadrunners... those of us who didn’t have one of those, sure wished that we could.

When we talked about “manifolds,” we had only two things in mind: intake and exhaust. Those were the kinds of manifolds I came to know intimately, under the hood of a car. Not that I had a muscle car, mind you. My earnings as a busboy, dishwasher and later, short-order cook, would never have stretched to such lengths. No, my car had half as many cylinders as those mighty steeds. And smaller ones, too. The many hours I spent learning to work on car engines were dedicated to keeping my old, worn and relatively slow Triumph Spitfire roadworthy. I came to know its manifolds (or at least, the intake manifold) very well—mostly due to its all-too-temperamental twin carburetors... but that is a story for another time.

At some point along the way, I realized that “manifold” was a word I had also encountered in a very different context, as we sang

*Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.*

Eventually I realized that “manifold” had to do with “many,” and that the manifolds I had come to know under the hood of a car took their name from the many (though in my case, really, *not* so many) openings they connected. Something that could be described as “manifold” was something that had some kind of variety, diversity, multiplicity.

And then I bumped into the word again, in Peter’s call to the early followers of Jesus to put what they had received from God at the service of others:

Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.

1 Peter 4:10 NRSV

Or, as it is rendered in the New Living Translation:

God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another.

God’s grace is truly manifold... greatly varied... multi-faceted... polychrome... many-splendored. I have experienced it in more ways than I can begin to tell. I have needed it in more ways than I am eager to confess.

It is certainly undeserved goodness offered **to us**. But, as Peter here (and Paul, and the rest of the Biblical writers, elsewhere) indicates, it is always also meant to be God’s goodness **through us**, to others.

As God’s love and goodness moves in and through us, onward to others, it takes myriad forms. Surely the most basic is to mirror God’s own character by seeking the good of the

other. At the most personal and individual level, we do this by loving and forgiving. As we move from the personal and individual level to the public and community (and on to national and global) levels, mirroring God's own character becomes visible in what Israel's prophets were so concerned about: seeking the common good, doing justice.

These basic ways of expressing grace are something we all share—or should. But Peter here (and Paul, elsewhere) goes beyond the basic. In addition to our shared responsibility to love persons and seek justice for communities and creation, Peter sees God enabling each person to reflect God's goodness to others in ways for which they are specifically (perhaps even uniquely) equipped by the Spirit of God at work in us. Peter joins Paul in saying that God's grace (*charis*) takes the form of gifts (*charismata*) that equip us to serve others and contribute to the common good in our own individual ways.

I have been thinking a lot, lately, about being a "good steward of" ("using well") the grace I have received. (I suspect this comes from the growing awareness [or shrinking denial] that our movement into the life of the age to come [John 4:14, 5:24] is not seamless, but passes through a major punctuation mark as the life we currently know and love comes to an end... but that is a subject for another time.)

All of us can be used of God in many ways beyond those special gifts of grace that are ours. But, what does it mean to "use well" the gifts we have received? For the last couple of years, I have had a growing conviction that, for me, it means refocusing the way I invest my life in serving Christ's mission.

About five and a half years ago, I responded to God's call to spend less time and energy using the gifts God had provided me for teaching and writing, and to dedicate that time and energy to supporting the work of my inspiring and beloved colleagues as a member of the home office team of International Ministries. So, since the end of 2011, occasional writing and itinerant teaching around the world have been the smaller part of my service through IM; administrative support of others' ministries has been the larger part.

This fall I will be responding to God's call to return to those first loves of teaching and writing. Even now, a search is under way to identify the person or persons who will use their gifts of administration to step into my role at the home office as I move from part time to full time service as one of IM's "global consultants," working in theological education.

It has been a great privilege to work in support of the mission service of colleagues and partners around the world. It has also been overwhelming. Those of you who have sustained my global mission service since 2008 through your prayers and financial gifts may well have been wondering, "why is Stan writing to us so infrequently these days?" I am deeply grateful for your patience! Thank you so much for continuing to support the theological education work God does through me, in spite of the long silences! I very much look forward to the opportunity, later this year, to once again share more frequently with you the ways I am seeing God at work, and the reflections sparked by all of that.

Please pray for this time of transition. First, please pray for God's leading throughout the process of selecting the next person to serve as "associate executive director for global mission." Second, please pray that God will bless and guide the transfer of responsibilities, so that I can help the next person get off to the best possible start. Third, please pray that God would raise up many new individuals and churches to provide the additional financial support I will need as I return to full time service in the preparation of leaders for the global church.

Thank you so much for your partnership in the gospel. God's mercies and God's calling are refreshed every morning. I am excited to enter into this new season of service with you. May the Lord also renew your gifts, your calling and your passion for mission this day!

Blessings,
Stan