

**“Excel in Everything”**

**2 Corinthians 8:1-9**

**10/4/09**

**God has given us all gifts, with which we must excel in using. Bring excellence to all you do, whatever it is you are given. There is no gift too small or detail unimportant—all is vital for the church.**

My Grandpa Hollinger grew up in central PA, a lifetime in the Church of the Brethren, graduated from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. He never had a lot of money—the most he made was after he retired, when he worked for a park making \$5.25/hour.

But in everything he did he did it with gusto. My grandparents were house parents for the Milton Hershey students—kids from broken homes who needed love. And they got it. My grandpa worked for Milton Hershey’s farms as a mechanic. I am pretty sure he knew everyone, and many times Milton Hershey himself would stop and have a chat with my grandpa.

Milk was stored in big vats on the farms which was used for making chocolate. Milton Hershey developed a serious problem where the milk was going bad before they were using it. All the best engineers came and studied the problem and came up with no answer. And then one night my grandpa had a dream, woke up and wrote it down, and he himself fixed the problem.

My home church was spotless for 18 years because my grandparents were the caretakers for those years. My grandpa was like a schoolboy with excitement when it came time to go and work for a couple weeks on disaster relief projects. After retirement, he worked for a park as the groundskeeper for the baseball fields. He brought such an excellence that they named the main ball field after him when he died.

One day, a couple years after he died, a man knocked on my grandma’s door, someone she did not know. He simply said, “I want to let you know how Emory touched my life with his service and love. What a wonderful world it would be if everyone was like him.”

Now my grandpa was far from perfect. He messed up plenty. He was certainly fully human. But I often think of him when I think of someone giving their all for Christ.

*“Excel in everything”*, Paul says.

In the coming weeks this is going to be the message we hear: that no matter who you are or what gifts you have been given we are all called to do our best with it. Not be the best, but do our best.

And Paul lays it out for us: Excel in everything. Alright, that starts us off pretty much covering it all. Everything: in Faith, in Speech, in Knowledge, in Eagerness, in Love.

**Excel in everything.**

Paul is speaking to the Corinthian Church, encouraging them to live into the life and power they have been given through Jesus Christ.

He uses the Macedonian believers as an example, that despite extreme trials that they face they begged to be a part of supporting the believers in Jerusalem who were also struggling. It was obviously what they felt God calling them to do. I am sure they did many other things as they grew as a church. I am sure they served many other people. But in this moment they were called, compelled, crying out to give.

And when they did, they exceeded expectation. They excelled. They gave in abundance.

And so Paul says to the Corinthians, Look, here is an example of excelling in something. And I want you to excel in everything that you do. Not because I told you to. But because God has already done it all for you through Jesus.

Excel in everything. Excellence.

**To excel is to do your best with who you are and what you have.**

“Excel” here in 2 Corinthians is also used to mean abundance. To exceed. It is to say, that whether or not you use all that God has given you, you have been given an abundance in Christ.

Jesus said I came to give them life, and life in abundance. That is here and now. In Christ we have all the fruit of the Spirit. We have strength. We have peace. We are rich in all that truly matters.

And so that potential is there for all of us—that abundance bursting forth, exceeding expectations. To excel in everything. Paul is speaking of the spiritual gifts we have in Christ, and I want to take that word “everything” and use it for our lives now just as it sounds—excel in everything you do. No matter what the task or job or situation, do it abundantly well. Pour your best into it. Bring excellence to your life.

**Excel in everything you do: This is not about the grandiose.**

Martin Luther King, Jr. speaking to students at Barratt Junior High School in Philadelphia on October 26, 1967, six months before he was assassinated, said:

“If it falls your lot to be a street sweeper, sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures, sweep streets like Beethoven composed music, sweep streets like Shakespeare wrote poetry. Sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will have to pause and say: Here lived a great street sweeper who swept his job well.”

**Excel in who you are: This is not about comparison.**

I can't think of anything I do that somebody can't do better. Becky is more disciplined to walking, Howard plays better golf, Shelley is more organized, Joseph's a better musician, Clyde tells funnier stories, Mike's car is cleaner. And those are just the local comparisons.

Television puts excellence in every living room, so we see national or world best. Now you can stack my sermons against the nation's finest communicators. Or we have our hometown musicians who feel they must compete with the extraordinarily gifted and trained professionals.

If excellence comes by comparison, by excelling among my peers, I lose. I am not the smartest, strongest, most disciplined, or the purist of faith.

But what I do have, what I have been given by God, I must do my absolute best in using.

How many of us identify the call of the Lord Jesus Christ with excellence for the sake of His church and kingdom?

I think too often the motto of the church, the church in general I mean, is: “*Come weal or woe, The only status we know is quo.*”

The present challenge before our church calls for a commitment to excellence. We will, in the days ahead, be called upon to give time, talent, and resources.

Yes, God is stretching us and calling us to step out of our comfort zones, but that is what He does with His church. He has always led His people into new worlds and new people for His glory and the salvation of all.

Yes, it means that you and I must be in prayer over this. You and I must pray and ask God what it is that He wants us to do with all that He has given us. Trust Him completely.

Do the best with what you have been given. If God has given us pebbles, God does not expect us to build a pyramid, but God does expect us to build to the best of our ability. If God

has given us burlap thread, God does not expect us to weave golden garments, but God expects us to weave something to the best of our ability.

To excel is something I must learn, practice, strive for always. It doesn't just happen, but takes effort on our part.

I mean, a baseball player doesn't excel at catching the fly ball because he just jumped off the couch at home and into the game. There are years of practice, learning, and of course, getting into the game.

And guess what? Sometimes the ball is dropped.

**Failure is part of excelling.**

How can that be? Excelling means I give my all, live abundantly in Christ. Yes, and sometimes when I am in action, learning, growing, trying, well, I mess up. That's how we learn and grow. Because if you never fail that means you are not in the game.

I'm not a baseball expert, but I know that batters who excel at hitting the ball average about 37% success rate. We say "He bats .375" to make it sound like a bigger number. That's 37.5% of the time. That means 62.5% of the time he fails. And gets paid millions for it. Funny.

Anyway, the point is if you don't get involved, get in the game, you will never have an opportunity to excel. And when you're in action, sometimes you will fail.

But as Pastor Craig Groeschel says, we need to "fail forward." You try, fail, learn, adjust, and try again. Allow God to use what you have done to mold you into someone better.

Jesus' disciple Peter is a great example. Peter became someone I would say who excelled in faith and speech and leadership as he took charge of the very start of the church.

Oh, but listen: Peter once gave his advice to Jesus, telling Him He should not give up His life and thereby was called Satan by Jesus. Ouch.

Peter was the one who had to get out of the boat and walk on the water. So Jesus said do it, and Peter did. Only to immediately become overwhelmed by the situation and sink.

Peter, in his zeal to defend Jesus when He was arrested, cut off a temple guard's ear, again going against Jesus' wishes.

No doubt, the biggy, the one that made Peter weep bitterly, was his denial of Jesus, not once, not twice, but three times blatantly saying He did not know Jesus after all that he had been through with Jesus.

And yet, it is Peter who stands up at Pentecost and preaches, followed by 3000 new members. And on he went.

To excel means sometimes we fail. But with God we fail forward and grow.

When I started to preach when I was here at Oakland as a student preacher—wow. I know Pastor Fred and all of you had grace with me. At one point, early on, I thought I had what it takes to preach my sermons from just an outline. It didn't work. As one of you recently and rightly pointed out to me: I was saying a whole lot and nothing at all. Fred always helped me be aware of that too. ☺

But you learn and grow and continue to do your best, giving your all in all you do.

**When we excel for God, we have the assurance of that God is behind, beyond, and within it all.**

We are simply putting our lives in His hands, under His control, where we are always assured that our efforts are not in vain. Simply read about the early disciples and early church to assure yourself of that. They gave all they had, yes even their lives, and here we are today.

**Your efforts are not in vain.**

1 Corinthians 15:58 encourages us:

*“Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”*

If you are called to clean up the kitchen after Wednesday night meals, excel in the details.

If you are called to serve on a team, excel in commitment.

If you are called to greet folks on Sunday morning, excel in enthusiasm.

If you are called to teach a class, excel in eagerness.

We are called to be the church for our community. May we excel in our love and desire to reach them.

Excel in everything, by no means because I said it, but because God has already done it for us in Christ. In Him you have what it takes. Amen.