

I've always liked to sing. I used to enjoy singing at church, and I'll never forget singing "The Happy Wanderer" in our elementary school music classes. In high school somehow I even got involved in a male chorus. My voice had changed by then, I guess, but I still had what we joked about as a "fuzzy" voice. When I went to college, I many times joined a devotional group to sing in the evenings, but doing that and singing at church were the full extent of my public singing.

After college and graduate school, I married and settled into a routine life with work and church activities. I taught classes at church and even preached at small congregations around the community. Eventually, though, I became divorced and somewhat discouraged about participation in church activities. I faded a bit into the background, and I'm sure that many people didn't know what to do or say. But there were some notable exceptions such as my cousin Steven and his wife Susie, who kept checking on me and inviting me over to their house. And then there was my friend and former college roommate Tommy, who sent me a note sharing his concern for me and offering his help.

Tommy has been our worship leader at church for quite some time. A few years ago, our congregation invested in a good sound system, several wireless microphones, and an audio mixing board. Tommy had the idea that if the four-part harmony was supported by people using the microphones, then others in the audience could follow the music better. It was a great idea – but then he asked me to sing the bass part.

I can carry a tune, but I realize that I am not a great singer. Tommy himself, who in leading us sings soprano, has a better range than me even for the low notes. Mostly I am just loud. I agreed to participate, but it was mostly to help out my friend.

The more I held that microphone, the more I began to wonder about what I was doing in this stealth quartet. I began to wonder if Tommy asked me to sing, not for my voice, but to make me more a part of the church. It was as if he were throwing me a lifeline (even though I wasn't really drowning). I actually wondered if Tommy had my mic level turned down or perhaps even off.

But his idea seemed to work very well. With the group I felt like I could sing; our voices blended together somehow and the group made up for my lack. And there were times when I finished breathless with the effort and the magic of the resonance that filled the walls of the church and my heart.

I appreciated Tommy treating me as if I were worth something. Reckoned as able to sing, so to speak (see Romans 4:9). As I studied more about the whole situation, though, I understood that this grace was extended to me for the purpose of establishing a deeper relationship with the church. The great lesson to be learned is that God extends His Grace to us for the same reason. He wants us to be in His inner circle, and as close to Him as we will let ourselves be.

At our congregation we still sing with the spirit and the sound system. Tommy works to teach us new songs, which enhance our worship together. And he is so right – the songs are planted in my heart and I find myself singing them when I get home. This is also part of the lesson – that the beauty of the relationship we find lifts our hearts as it turns our souls to God.