

The Power of a Project

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Today's scripture reading is taken from several places in the Old Testament book of Exodus.

So I'll be reading from chapter 25, verses 1 to 8, chapter 35, verses 20 to 22, 25 and 29, chapter 36, verses 3 to 7, and chapter 40, verses 34 and 35.

It's all printed in the liturgy. A reading from the book of Exodus. The Lord said to Moses, tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from everyone whose heart prompts them to give.

These are the offerings you are to receive from them. Gold, silver, and bronze. Blue, purple, and scarlet yarn and fine linen. Goat hair.

[1 : 13] Ram skins dyed red and another type of durable leather. Acacia wood. Olive oil for the light. Spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense. And onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breastpiece.

Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Then the whole Israelite community withdrew from Moses' presence. And everyone who was willing and whose heart moved to them came and brought an offering to the Lord for the work on the tent of meeting.

The tent of meeting for all its service and for the sacred garments. All who were willing, men and women alike, came and brought gold jewelry of all kinds. Brooches, earrings, rings, and ornaments.

They all presented their gold as a wave offering to the Lord. Every skilled woman spun with her hands and brought what she had spun. Blue, purple, or scarlet yarn of fine linen.

All the Israelite men and women who were willing brought to the Lord free will offerings for all the work the Lord through Moses had commanded them to do. They received from Moses all the offerings the Israelites had brought to carry out the work of constructing the sanctuary.

[2 : 23] And the people continued to bring free will offerings morning after morning. So all the skilled workers who were doing all the work on the sanctuary left what they were doing and said to Moses, The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the Lord commanded to be done.

Then Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp. No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary. And so the people were restrained from bringing more because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work.

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it. And the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Good morning.

Good morning. I want to just reflect this morning together on this theme, really today and next week, this theme of building God's house together.

[3 : 40] Building God's house together. For what was that first great collective project, you know, that the people of God were working on together in the desert after they were liberated from slavery in Egypt.

They were building the house of God together. They were building this sanctuary of God, the tabernacle of God. Now, why have I chosen this text and this theme? Well, I want to prepare you for our congregational meeting that's following.

I want to prepare you for conversations we're going to be having over the next six months. If you've been with us before, hopefully you've heard us say that the mission of Christ Church is to lead people into a deeper relationship with Christ and His church through community and for the city.

But the primary inhibitor to our mission right now is the debt that we owe on this facility in which we sit. And so it's mission critical for us to eliminate that debt over the next 12 months.

And our solution to this problem is to raise an additional \$600,000. And the urgency to do that, to take this bold step of faith, is that we have a balloon payment due on this building at the end of 2024.

[5 : 02] Now, I can already see some of you are looking for the exits, eyes glazing over, the preachers talking about money, and that's kind of weirding me out.

It's hard enough to listen to NPR's pledge drive without changing the channel. But to hear this, you know, religious professional talking about money, that's just a step too far.

But what I want to do, my goal today is just to slowly, gently, kindly put this opportunity on your radar. I've not buried the lead, I've just put it right here on the top of the newspaper.

And I want to give you a little bit of teaching today about biblical generosity. And in the new year, after Christmas, after Easter, we'll circle back and slowly just define and teach what the Bible has to say about stewardship.

Now, if you don't want to wait for six months, you can go ahead and begin giving now. I give you permission. You can come to our meeting. You can get the information you need and figure out what God is prompting you to give.

[6 : 09] And we thank you for that. But I believe that I've been here about 18 years. And I think this is the most important budget that we've ever brought before this church.

We launched our church in 2005-06. And so we have our 20th birthday as a church in sight. And we really want to position ourselves over the next few years for the coming 20 years ahead of us.

As we look back to what God's done, we want to look ahead to what He wants to do. And we sense that God is leading us into a season of ministry that's about growth, that's about growing deeper and growing wider.

So we want to provide you the information today. And we really want to provide you the motivation that you need to join in and participate in that mission with us. So enough about our budget.

Let's talk about God's Word. When you look at the first book of the Bible, Genesis, the story of God's creation of the universe is told there in a mere 34 verses with utmost brevity.

[7 : 20] And so it's quite striking that one-third of the book of Exodus is devoted to this building project. Why would the author of these books take 15 times as long to tell the story of the building of the tabernacle than he did telling the story of the building of the universe?

It's to communicate to us that the house of God and the worship of God is extremely important. The story of the Exodus, as you know, starts in slavery.

But it doesn't end when the people of God leave Egypt. In fact, the story does not end, it's not complete, until they finally get to the house of God and worship. The point of these people being set free, the point of them being set at liberty, is not just to be free, it's to worship God and to serve God.

And so until God becomes the most important thing in their lives, until God becomes the most central thing that's organized in their lives, they're actually not a liberated people, they're not a free people.

That's the point of the book of Exodus. So, of course, here they are, they're called to build the house of God, but they can't build that house of God together without the resources, without the materials for that building.

[8 : 39] So I want to take a deeper look at this scripture to, again, just slowly, gently, kindly introduce to you a biblical definition of generosity and stewardship.

You ready to go? Okay. Well, I want to talk about the gift of giving. I want to talk about the gladness of grace. And I want to talk about the glory of God with us.

The gift of giving, the gladness of grace, and the glory of God with us. Look at the first verse in our reading today. It says, the Lord said to Moses, Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering.

You are to receive the offering for me from everyone whose heart prompts them to give. And then in verse 8 it says, Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them.

Now, this is brilliant, because how do you take 12 tribes of former slaves who've been stripped of their identity over the course of 430 years, and how do you unite them together as a free people?

[9 : 45] These are people who share a past in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They share a present in Egypt, and now it's Sinai. But how do you help them share a common sense of responsibility for the future together?

Well, in God's wisdom, he gives them a group project. And this is not your typical 20-80 project. Kids, youth, I hate to tell you, but you're going to spend the rest of your life working on 20-80 projects, where 20% of the people do 80% of the heavy lifting, and you can make your parents very proud by being part of that 20% and not part of the 80%.

But this group project is supposed to be different. And in fact, it's the turning point of the book of Exodus, because until now, God has done all the work.

God struck Egypt with plagues. God took the people out to freedom. He divided the sea. He gave them dry land to walk on. He's given them manna from heaven and water from the rock.

And even still at this point, they don't yet cohere as a nation. They're still a group of individuals, a group of tribes. There's a lot more me than there is we.

[11 : 02] They're not yet taking responsibility and acting collectively. And so what can God do to transform these people? Well, God instructs Moses to take the people through a role reversal.

So he says, instead of me doing things for them, I now want them to make something for me. I want you to ask them to build something together, to make a visible, symbolic home for my divine presence and construct this collective house of worship.

It doesn't need to be large. It doesn't need to be permanent. In fact, God doesn't need the sanctuary at all. He's at home everywhere. But he wants to use this tabernacle to teach his people how to live with him at the center of their lives.

And so God says to Moses to get them to give, get them to make something, get them to become builders. And this, in fact, transformed this disparate people into a cohesive group and gave them a sense of shared identity and common responsibility for the future.

And I want you to notice how they gave to this project. Look at chapter 35, verse 21. It says that everyone who was willing and whose heart moved them came and brought an offering to the Lord.

[12 : 25] And then in verse 22, it says, all who were willing, men and women alike, came and brought their gold and jewels. And then it says in verse 29, all the Israelite men and women who were willing brought to the Lord freewill offerings.

What's repeated here? That this is a willing offering to God. That this is a freewill offering to God. That the generous giving of these people is actually the evidence that their wills as former slaves have been set free from bondage.

They've not just been set free externally from bondage, but their wills on the inside have been set free from bondage. Because generosity at its core is not a financial issue, it's a spiritual issue.

And Israel had been learning up to this point a very important lesson on their journey so far with God about the will of God and the willingness of God.

Right? Here in this place of the wilderness, this place of desert and scarcity and nothingness, here in this place of emptiness and void and threat, they experienced God over and over, not as a God of scarcity, but as a God of generous, miraculous abundance.

[13 : 48] In this place, they experienced and they met a God who they realized was willing for their sakes to fill the desert with bread.

They met this God who was willing to make these dry rocks bubble up and over with water. And day after day, every morning they would go and they would harvest this willing, plentiful abundance, this daily bread that God had provided for them in this place of scarcity.

And each evening they'd come home and they'd find this meat on their tables. And what they learned about this God who was willing and this God who was so generous in his abundance was that it began to unlock a generosity in them.

It began to unlock a generosity in their wills. That as people made in the image of this God, they began to imitate him and their giving out of willing hearts began to express, more fully express, their humanity and who God meant them to be.

But I want you to notice not only how they gave to this project, but notice what they gave to this project. Look at the list of offerings that they bring before God.

[15 : 12] Precious metals of gold, silver, and bronze, expensive dyed yarns of blue, purple, and scarlet, which were marks of wealth and nobility and royalty.

Brutches, earrings, rings, ornaments. This is not the kind of stuff you put out at your garage sale, right? These are costly, precious things, costly offerings.

And the question is, where in the world did this desert-dwelling group of refugees get all this costly stuff? Well, if you go back to Exodus 12, it says this.

The Israelites did as Moses instructed and they asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. And the Lord made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people and they gave them what they asked for, so they plundered the Egyptians.

Not only did God deliver his people out of bondage, utterly unharmed, but he also somehow moved the wills of their captors. He moved the wills of their oppressors so that they gave gifts to take with them.

[16 : 20] And what the people learned in this is that everything that they had was not an entitled right, but was an undeserved gift that had been given to them by God.

Precious metals, luxury fabrics, fine jewelry, priceless gems and stones. When God asked them, in your freedom, will you offer these things up to me?

They knew that God was only asking of them what he had already given to them in the first place. They knew that when God commands the tithe over and over in the Torah, he's not asking them to give 10% of what is theirs.

He's asking them to only keep 90% of what is his. And they're to say to themselves, you know, we're not owners with entitled rights.

We're stewards. We're managers. And everything we have is an undeserved gift. And when they realized that, it unlocked a radical generosity in them.

[17 : 29] And so that's just the question today. It's not about how much money we have or we're gonna give. It's do you know this God? Do you know this God who's willing and generous in his abundance?

Do you know this God and have you received undeserved gifts from him? And has his generosity been unlocked in you so that you're now willingly imitating back to him his generosity toward you?

That's the gift of giving. Amen. So I wanna talk not only about the gift of giving, but also I wanna talk about the gladness of grace. The gladness of grace.

Look at verse 21 of chapter 35. It says, everyone who was willing and whose heart moved them came and brought an offering to the Lord.

And I love that word everyone. All the people had an opportunity to take part. It wasn't just the men, it was the women too, right?

[18 : 32] First egalitarian society in the ancient world. It wasn't just the elites, it was the people as a whole, everybody, no matter what you had, you could participate in this project.

But when it says, everyone whose heart moved them brought an offering, does that sound familiar to you? Do you remember another story where the hearts of the people moved them to take off their gold jewelry and lift it up as an offering?

That's what the people did when they created the golden calf, right? When they fashioned this idol in the middle of this building project. It's interesting. We started reading in chapter 25 where God says, I want you to make this offering and build this sanctuary.

And then you have in chapter 32 this great betrayal, this massive infidelity on behalf of the people of God. And now we come to chapter 35 where the gifts are actually given.

And what's happened in this intervening time is that though the people have betrayed God, God has graciously put the infidelity of his people right.

[19 : 43] God and his grace, if you just go back and read these last few chapters, he's forgiven them. He's restored the relationship and he's received them back into a renewed covenant with him.

And so when these people, these forgiven people are thinking back to that golden calf moment, what were they doing there?

What were they doing there at the golden calf? Were they giving to that project out of a sense of duty and a sense of sacrifice? No, it says that they were giving to that project out of revelry and dancing.

They were giving to that project with an effortless generosity. They just gladly gave to this idol everything that they had in the hopes that this idol would make their lives okay.

And you know, most of us, we can probably think about ways in which we ourselves have effortlessly and gladly given our money to get things.

[20 : 45] But you know, usually it's not just to get the material thing. We're trying to get the thing behind the thing, the thing beneath the thing. So we give our money to get security or comfort.

We give our money to get independence or belonging. We give of our money to gain status or power or approval or control.

All of us, if we followed our money far back enough, beyond just the material thing to the thing beneath the thing and behind the thing, it will usually lead you to some sort of golden calf in your life.

Some sort of false idol that you think this thing and not God is going to make me okay. But we should always be asking ourselves of these things that we so gladly and effortlessly give our money to.

Do you love me? Will you die for me? Will you forgive me when I fail? Will you fulfill me when I succeed?

[21 : 53] Will you hold me when I have nothing to offer you? Will you save me? You see why it's so important for these people who had just been worshiping the golden calf to come and bring their gift and to give this gift from the heart.

They're to be moved from the heart. And it's that moving of the heart that's so critical because this moment is a matter of repentance. They're turning their hearts away from this false idol for whom they had gladly danced down the aisle and effortlessly given their most precious possessions and they're turning their hearts back to this God of grace who made them and who redeemed them and who protects them and provides for them.

And they're saying in this moment that God and God alone deserves not just our stuff, He deserves our hearts. He deserves the movement of our hearts and our affections.

You know, the message of the gospel is that God has not withheld from us but He's graciously given to us His only Son.

He's given to this world of idol-making, calf-worshiping people, His beloved Son, Jesus. And amazingly, Jesus sees us giving ourselves and our lives to all these things that are not worthy of our lives.

[23 : 26] But Jesus gladly and willingly gives us His life and His blood and He gives us His breath to win us back to the Father. So that when we see God, this God of all grace, giving Himself for us, when we see this God of all grace, dying for us as our substitute on the cross, when we see Jesus making us in that moment His treasure, what do we want to do?

We want to make Him our treasure above all else. Right? When we see Jesus as the one true willing giver whose heart moved Him to be emptied of all the riches of heaven, when we see Jesus' heart moving Him to be stripped of everything that He had, when we see Jesus' heart moving Him to dance down the aisle to the altar of God for the joy set before Him, and when we see Jesus' heart moving Him to gladly lay down His life as an offering in our place, when we see Jesus giving Himself like this for us, this God of grace, displaying the infinite grace that He has for us on His cross, does it cause your heart to move?

Does it fill your heart with gladness and with gratitude? Does it make you want to dance down the aisle to the altar and just gladly and effortlessly give to God all that you are and all that you have because He's the only God who made you, who's given His grace to redeem you, who day by day is protecting you and providing for you?

I think that's what's going on with these people in chapter 35. There are people who've been touched by the grace of God. And so it says in chapter 36, actually, verse 3, it says, the people continued to bring freewill offerings morning after morning so all the skilled workers who were doing all the work on the sanctuary left what they were doing and said to Moses, the people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the Lord commanded to be done.

Then Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp, no man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary. And so the people were restrained from bringing more because they already had what was more than enough to do all the work.

[26 : 05] And of course, you know, this is every pastor's dream. You know, that the hearts of the people would be so moved by the grace of God that their hearts would just be so urging them, their hearts would be rousing them to respond to the grace of God, their hearts would be pushing them in an inward voluntary compulsion to give that they'd not be saying to themselves, what's the bare minimum required?

How much is enough? But rather, they would be saying to themselves, like these people were saying to themselves, look at how gracious God is. Look at how wonderful his works of grace are toward us.

The Lord's unstinting, overflowing grace, particularly in the midst of our betrayal and our infidelity and our lack of faithfulness, God's grace toward us is so great that it's getting inside of our hearts and it's moving our hearts not to dance for all these false gods and these substitute counterfeit gods, but to just dance down the aisle and at extravagant personal cost to ourselves just to lay our most precious treasures down before him.

You know, this outpouring of plenty and excess, it caused these skilled craftsmen to say, Moses, make them stop. We actually can't even process anymore.

And Moses had to say, cease and desist. He had to put a restraining order on their glad, grace-based generosity. Why?

[27 : 48] Because they all knew there's more than enough grace from God. And so there's going to be more than enough for the work that God wants to do among us.

And that's what the grace of God and the gladness and the gratitude of responding to his grace does to us. So the gift of giving and the gladness of grace, and Andrew, do I have time?

Can I just, a few more minutes? I want to talk about the glory of God with us. Okay? So, Genesis begins with God creating the universe as a home for humankind, but Exodus ends with human beings creating a sanctuary as a home for God.

Genesis, God is there, he's creating the heavens and the earth as a space for people. But in Exodus, the redeemed people of God, with all their gifts and their labor and their skills and their time and their energy, they're creating a space for God in this world.

They gave their precious resources, but they also gave their physical presence. They gave their treasures, but they also gave their time and their talents. And because these many people freely gave their many different gifts, they built the first house of God.

[29 : 07] Now, I actually have a slide. Hopefully, this first slide comes up. It's a black and white slide that sort of shows you all the 12 tribes and how they're centered around this one central tent.

And then I have a colored slide that shows you that this is a luxurious tent. It's full of pure gold and expensive fabrics and precious stones. It's really the mobile palace for a king.

And they built this amazing building, but that's not the end of the story because if all you have built is a house of God, who really cares about that?

It's just a mailing address. And if all you've really planted is just a community of people living around that building, who really cares about that? That's just another social group. So what do you need more than just a house of God and a community of God?

You need God himself. You need God himself to come down in all of his presence and his power. You need the glory and the goodness of God.

[30 : 15] You need the glory and the goodness of this king to come and fill up this luxurious palace that the people have made for him. And that's what God says in chapter 28.

He says, have them make a sanctuary for me so that I can dwell among them, so that I can dwell in the center of them. And then it says in chapter 40, it says, then the cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

God comes down from heaven to earth. He comes from the top of Mount Sinai down to the people in the valley. This transcendent God of awe-inspiring power comes down as this imminent indwelling presence.

God, the God of the universe, becomes our neighbor. He becomes intimate and close within the camp and among the people. And he says to them when this happens, he's saying to them, I want you to have all my goodness and all of my glory dwelling in your midst.

I want my beauty to be the center of your life. I want my holiness to be the focal point of all that you are and all that you do wherever you go.

[31 : 30] And I want to meet with you here day after day, week after week as this point of connection and communication and communion between you and me.

And what's amazing is, you know, we quote this all the time, but in the Gospel of John, it says that in the beginning was the Word and the Word was God and the Word became flesh and in the Greek it says he pitched his tent among us.

He came and he tabernacled right in the center of us. And you know, what's so astonishing and so breathtaking about Christianity is not only that God came down in the human flesh of Jesus, it's that God continues to come down by the Holy Spirit to dwell in us individually as little temples of the living God.

He comes down by the Holy Spirit to dwell among us corporately as a mini-tabernacle, a mini-sanctuary for the living God. You see, God lives not in houses of wood and stone, but he lives in the souls of his people.

He lives in the loving relationships of his people. God is not to be found in great buildings. God is to be found in the regenerate heart. God is to be found in a revived church.

[32 : 56] And so when we pray for revival, what we're praying for is this. What we're praying for is saying, God, all the activity that we're doing, all the time we're giving, all the money we're spending, all the energy we're exerting, none of that's really going to amount to very much unless and until the glory of the Lord fills the tabernacle.

Unless and until the Holy Spirit comes down in greater and greater measure and you give us more and more of yourself. And isn't that what we want in this next season of our life together?

An unusual outpouring and manifestation of the very presence of the one true living God. His goodness, His glory, making its home here among us, saturating us with the presence and the power of this King who's worthy of all these precious things.

Right? And so that's my prayer. You know, it says that Moses, he can't even enter in to the tabernacle because the glory of God is filling it up so much.

There's no room for Moses, there's no room for anybody else because God's fullness is so thick in that place. And that's my prayer for us that in this next season God's presence and His power, His goodness and His glory would be so thick.

[34 : 31] It'd be so full. It'd be so weighty and so substantive and so undeniably real here when we come to meet Him that we feel we can barely, just barely enter in.

We can barely stand up before this God who's given us the immense privilege of building a house for Him together.

And that's my prayer in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.