

# Service

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Our vision as a church is to equip for gospel fruitfulness, to ensure that we have as believers everything we need in order to be Christians, the best Christians we can be at home, in the workplace, in school, university, wherever we are. In order to achieve that vision, we want to work according to four spheres, mission, worship, discipleship, and service. And so today is the last of these spheres, service. We're going to look at Exodus chapter 31 from verse 1 to verse 11, where the Lord said to Moses, See, I have called by name Bezalel, and so on.

Jesus Christ died on the cross to take away our sins and to give us eternal life. He shed His blood to liberate us from the chains of our shame and the condemnation of our guilt.

He died to give us life. In view of God's mercy in Christ, is it not reasonable that we should offer ourselves as living sacrifices for Him? Is it not reasonable that we should, by faith in Christ, offer Him our lives, our gifts, our talents, that we should give Him our all?

Exodus 31, although it concerns issues taking place over a thousand years before the birth of Jesus, is a vivid demonstration of how we as ordinary Christians may express our gratitude to God for His love for us and to serve Him with everything we are and everything we have.

Now, from a management perspective, Exodus 31 verses 1 through 11 makes fascinating reading. I don't think I'm revealing any secrets when I say that management really isn't my thing.

[ 2 : 1 4 ] But this passage of Scripture, perhaps more than any other, highlights how crucial effective management in the body of Christ is. We might not wish to call it management, but that's what it is, with the exception that it's guided, driven, and empowered by the Holy Spirit of God.

This passage is an example of the Apostle Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 12 about the body of Christ at work, how every Christian has a divinely given gift that he or she must use to build up the church and in so doing to bring glory to God. Well, there are two themes in these verses to which I wish to draw your attention, each of which is a buzzword in management theory, but find their origin here in Exodus 31. Vision, leadership. Vision, leadership. Vision, first of all. Vision. You will know that the word Exodus literally means the way out from, the way out from. Rightly so, we think of Exodus as the book which describes God's gracious giving of His people a way out from their slavery in Egypt.

It contains stories of the ten plagues and the Passover and the parting of the Red Sea. When we were on holiday last week, I read through the whole of Exodus in one sitting, and I would recommend you do that because it gives you a bigger view of the whole book of Exodus and how good God is throughout the whole book. But the big theme of Exodus, the big theme of Exodus is that God wants to be with His people. God wants to be with His people, and so He brings them out of Egypt to draw them close to Him. He gives them commandments detailing how, as His rescued people, they are to live.

And He directs them to build something called a tabernacle, which more easily for us is called a tent of meeting, a tent of meeting where He shall live with them. Now, God gave these directions to their leader Moses while Moses was on top of Mount Sinai with God. He revealed to Moses what that tent of meeting should look like, how it should be arranged, what material should be used in its construction. But what came first weren't the details of construction, but the reason for construction. Namely, God wanted His people to build Him a tent in which He could be with them, in which He could meet with them. In that tent, His presence would stay. God would show them His glory in the form of a dense cloud called the Shekinah, and from that tent, He would forgive their sin, bless their community, and protect them from their enemies. The vision did not consist in the details of the construction, but in the reason for the construction, the living God at the heart of His people, filling them with peace, hope, love, and assurance. The closeness Moses had experienced with God on top of Mount Sinai would now be shared with all of God's people in this tent of meeting.

The reason for the construction of the tent of meeting is given a few chapters earlier in Exodus 25 verse 7, where God says, Let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell in their midst. Exodus 25 verse 8. Let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them. The tent of meeting was an image of the paradise of the garden of Eden, where God dwelt with Adam and Eve. But even more than that, it was an image of the new heavens and the new earth, where God will dwell with His rescued and redeemed people in the beauty of His holiness.

[ 6 : 48 ] That was the reason for the construction of the tabernacle, that a holy God may dwell among His sinful people. God had revealed all this to His appointed leader Moses. So, when Moses went back down the mountain, He revealed it to the people by continually using the phrase, tent of meeting. Everyone in the Israelite camp knew why they were building this tabernacle.

They'd caught hold of the vision. It's the tent of meeting. It's all about meeting with God. It's God being with us. That vision was never obscured in the detail of the work that needed to be done.

Rather, it was the vision that drove the people to work so skillfully and so diligently. We could scarce find such direct teaching in a modern management theory manual. The vision must come first. Why we are doing drives what we are doing. It is to build up the church, and in so doing, to bring glory to Christ. You may not be aware of this, but last week, Scotty and Jonathan sanded all the window ledges in the building here. Maybe you can't tell. Sanded all the window ledges in the building here, and then they re-varnished them. No scabs on these window ledges anymore.

And I wonder whether when they hit a knot in the wood, they thought, why am I doing this? This is really hard work. I'm making a mess of this. When we hit a knot in the wood of whatever we are doing for God, we need to remember why we are doing it. To build up the church, and in so doing, to bring glory to Christ. And then we pick up the sander and get back to work again.

When we're trying to count the money and the columns don't match, rather than give up, we remember, why am I doing this? To build up the church, and in so doing, to bring glory to Christ.

[ 9 : 16 ] And we count the money again and again until we get the columns to match. The vision must come first. As God's people, rescued from death by the blood of a crucified Christ, we serve Him in building up His church and bringing glory to His name. At every stage in serving Him, we dare not miss the wood for the trees. We must keep the eyes of our heart firmly fixed on this, having been saved by the sacrifice of Christ for us. We must keep the vision before us. Having been redeemed, we now live with God.

One more thing here before we move on. Moses was the leader of God's people, and it was to him alone God spoke, delivering the instructions and giving the vision for the construction of the tent of meeting. But with us, it is very different. Listen very carefully. The minister is not the leader of this fellowship of God's people. He is only one of them. In the New Testament age, leadership is given not to one man, but to a group called the elders. The word Presbyterian comes from a Greek word meaning elders. To say that we are a Presbyterian church means that we are governed not by a man, but by elders, which means that the vision in this place comes not from one man, but from elders, from all of them speaking with one voice. It's their responsibility as a group to carefully listen to God through His Word and prayer, to communicate that vision, and then to keep that vision at the forefront of our minds as we're going about our business in the church. It's their responsibility to remind us why we are doing what we're doing, that having been saved by the blood of Christ, we now live for Him and with Him. The point is this. Why must come before how or what? Vision must come first. The clearer the vision of why we are serving God, the more enthusiastic and skillful our service for

Him will be. Keeping our vision clear is perhaps the most important step in growing an effective church and glorifying God in mission, worship, and discipleship. So, vision, that's first. Second, leadership.

Leadership. Leadership. Moses wasn't always a good manager. His first industrial dispute with an Egyptian had led to murder. He had tried to back out repeatedly of leading God's people. But here in Exodus 31, he shows the kind of leadership to which I'm sure all of us would want to aspire. In the first instance, he listens to God. He listens to God. This whole episode is couched in the terms of God's commands to Moses. God gave Moses all these instructions during their one-to-one encounter on top of Mount Sinai.

This is where we perhaps differ from secular management theory. Exodus 31 teaches us that God's vision isn't to fit in with how we choose to manage the church, but how we choose to manage the church is to fit in with God's vision. And how God reveals that vision is through our one-to-one encounters with Him, through His Word, and in prayer. Moses' ultimate brilliance as a leader comes from the closeness of his relationship with God. In the same way, the primary role of leaders in this church is the pursuit of God's plan as revealed through the Word and prayer. Let me emphasize this again. God's vision isn't to fit in with how we choose to do church, but how we do church is to fit in with God's vision. And how God reveals His vision is through our one-to-one encounters with Him through the Word and in prayer.

[ 14 : 11 ] In the second instance, note to self through this point, Moses doesn't go alone. He does not go alone. He's got a thousand things to do, and he knows he can't do them all, so he appoints others to help him.

Simple to say, none of us can go it alone. Nowadays, we call it delegation. It's not something that comes natural to me or to many of us. But if we are to succeed at putting God's vision to work, we need to learn how to delegate. We might want to do it all ourselves, but we can't. And even if we could, we'd make a bad job of it. The African proverb wisely says, if you want to go fast, go alone.

If you want to go far, go together. Too many leaders do everything alone. They're preachers, worship leaders, counselors, managers, clerks of works. The first thing Moses teaches us about leadership is that he does not go alone. He appoints Bezalel and Aholiab to help him. He delegates the construction of the tent of meeting to them. Well, in the third instance, Moses chooses the right people. He chooses the right people. Again, let me remind you, this has all been revealed to Moses by God on top of Mount Sinai, the instructions for construction, even down to the people he should choose to do the work.

God's covering all the bases. He's leaving nothing to chance. He has chosen and equipped these two men, Bezalel and Aholiab, and now he calls Moses to recognize his equipping of these men.

Notice how in verse 2, the first word God says to Moses is, see, see. That's a word which we may translate more accurately from Hebrew as recognize. Recognize. It's as if God's saying to Moses, recognize the people that I've gifted to do what you can't do. Recognize their gifting.

[ 16 : 22 ] Recognize that I've made them the right people to deliver my vision of constructing this tent of meeting. Now, the gifting of these two men was not only practical. Listen again to what God says to Moses. I have filled Bezalel with the Spirit of God, verse 3. I have filled him with the Spirit of God.

We tend to think of those who are practically gifted as being less spiritual than those who are devoted to preaching and pastoring. But not according to Exodus 31, and not according to the description of the deacons in Acts chapter 6, where those chosen to be deacons were, and I quote, to be of good repute, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. The New Testament deacons like Stephen and so on, just like Bezalel and Aholiab here in Exodus 31, were no less spiritual than the apostles or the priests. They were just called to express their spirit-given gifts in different ways.

But then notice also, the gifts of Bezalel and Aholiab were vital in the construction of this tent of meeting. They were vital. I have filled him with the Spirit of God, God says of Bezalel, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in silver, gold and bronze, in cutting stones for setting and carving wood, to work in every craft. When we read what the tent of meeting was to look like, what it was to contain, and even what the priests who were to work there were to wear, we realize it would have taken skilled craftsmen to have made these things. To have an idea in your head is one thing.

To grab that idea out of your head and to make it real is something else. You may not know, but before I was a minister, I was a research and development scientist.

My job was to work with theoretical chemistry, with test tubes in a laboratory and microscopes and all kinds of weird and wonderful things. But when I would come up with an idea, as often I did, to make it work in a laboratory was one thing. To make it work in a factory, so that the company that I was doing research for could actually make some money out of it, was a very different thing.

[ 19 : 12 ] And at that stage, I would get an engineer involved, and I would explain to him the chemistry and the theory behind all things. And he would go back to his workshop, and he would sit and think, and he'd figure out a process and construct the equipment to trial my idea in a factory setting.

It was as if that engineer had the ability to reach into my brain, grab my idea, and make it reality.

Well, thus were Bezalel and Aholiab. They were practical men filled with the Spirit of God. They were gifted in every craft. They were able to reach into Moses' brain and grab the vision God had given him and make it a reality. Our vision in this church is to equip for gospel fruitfulness, equip for gospel fruitfulness, to equip our people to be the best Christians we can be at home, at work, at university, at our leisure clubs, whatever we may be doing. But how to give practical expression to that vision? That's the question, is it not? To equip our children in discipleship requires dedicated rooms in this building. And it means giving our teachers the materials they need. We can have as many ideas as we like, but what we need are people who can grab the ideas out of our heads and make them a reality.

Someone who's going to decorate rooms, make them safe for our children. Someone who's going to provide finances and know-how for the teaching materials our teachers need. We need Bezalels and Aholiabs, men and women who give practical expression to their faith in design, in construction, in communication, in finance. There's no point in asking theoreticians to do this. They'd fall at the first base. They wouldn't have a clue how to do what they're being asked. We need the right people whom God has gifted.

Well, in the next instance, Moses gave them freedom to get on with the work. He gave them freedom to get on with the work. Moses had learned through bitter experience that micromanagement was the highway to stress and failure. One of the keys of the success of the construction of this tent of meeting was that having shared the vision and told Bezalel and Aholiab what God had said to him, he let them get on with the work without interfering with them. He let them get on with the work without interfering with them. He refused to micromanage the project, if we may use that term, but trusted those whom God had gifted to do a better job of construction than he could. After all, Moses was a shepherd.

[ 22 : 22 ] He was not a builder, a stonemason, or a joiner. Now, we see this freedom expressed in two ways in this passage.

In the first way, Bezalel and Aholiab engaged the services of many others who were gifted in different areas. There were many things to make, including lampstands and basins and curtains and priestly garments.

In verse 6, we read of the ability God had given to all able men in the Israelite community. Every necessary craft was represented, and so Bezalel and Aholiab delegated responsibility for different aspects of the construction to different craftsmen and crafts women. The women were often engaged in making the curtains and making the curtains and the priestly garments from different kinds of material.

And Moses didn't micromanage that process of delegation. He let those who knew what they were doing find the right people for the right jobs. Don't ask a carpenter to make a curtain. Don't ask a weaver to make the ark of the covenant. The weaver might have said, I'm no use at casting gold into shapes, but there was a job for her in making curtains. And the bronze smith might have said, well, I'm no use at stitching threads of purple yarn together to make priestly garments, but there was a job for him in making lampstands. And today, listen everyone, today we might be thinking to ourselves, I love gaming on my computer. I love playing Minecraft and Zelda. What use is that to the church? Trust me, much in every single way. For our technology team and our resource and communications group is always looking for volunteers to serve. Or we're thinking, I like flowers. I like gardening. What use is that to this church? Much in every way. I've been doing some gardening out in the front. You can see what a good job I've been doing of it because the weeds are that high.

We need help. Can anyone help? Or you might think to yourself, I am no longer physically able to do much at all in the church.

[ 25 : 10 ] Nothing. You especially have a huge contribution to make because your prayers are the engine room of this church.

And without an engine, nothing can move. Or perhaps you're thinking to yourself, all I'm good at is hammering nails. Hammering nails, that's all I'm good at. We need people like you, big style, in the building group. Whatever it is that you're good at, computer gaming, playing the guitar, playing the guitar, faffing about with bits of wood or in the garden, or just sitting at home praying. We need you on our team.

We need you to come to the Bezalels and the Holyabs in our congregation and say, I can do that. I can say hello to people as they come in the door.

I can put weed killer down in the front. I can look after all the pots. And then lastly here, notice also that the freedom Moses gave them to get on with the work extended to art and design. Extended to art and design. Now, God never went into detail as to what a cherubim looked like, such that Bezalel should have a picture of a cherubim from which he could cast the two golden cherubim on top of the Ark of the Covenant. God did not stipulate the exact proportion of the ingredients that should go into formulating the incense the priests should use in their services.

God did not go into detail as to the artistic designs the seamstresses should weave into the curtains of the tent of meeting. All of these artistic details were left to Bezalel, Aholiab, and their team of gifted craftspeople. It wasn't as if these things were unimportant, but God had given them skill and spirit-inspired imagination to make them beautiful, appealing, and pleasing. Don't give a shepherd, Moses, the task of artistic expression. Give it to those whom the Lord has gifted in this area. Let them get on with it without micromanaging, and then stand back and admire what God can do through the gifts of others. Serving God with artistic gifts is entirely as important as being able to handle an angle grinder or balance the account books. Are you artistic?

[ 27 : 55 ] Artistic. Artistic with words. Artistic with pictures. Artistic with drawing. Artistic with materials.

Artistic with music. We need you involved in serving God and the unique gifts God has given to you.

Now, none of this is about secular management, really. It's all about spiritual wisdom from God expressing itself in practical service for God. It's all about an embracing vision for the glory of God, the gospel of Christ, and the good of Glasgow's peoples. Is there anyone who's too old to demonstrate our gratitude to Christ for His dying love? Is there anyone too young to demonstrate our gratitude to Christ for His cross? Is there anyone too busy to demonstrate our gratitude to Christ? You shouldn't be.

Is there anyone too housebound to serve Him gladly and skillfully? Is there anyone too new to our congregation? This might be your first time here today. Is there anyone too new to our congregation to express their love for Jesus? No, no, and no again. This church, just like any church, truth be told, 80% of the work is done by 20% of the people. Just as the whole community of Israel contributed to the construction of the tent of meeting, this is an opportunity for the 80% who aren't contributing to glorifying God with the gifts that He's given us. Now, all that remains is to put up the hands of our hearts, because we're in the free church, of course, and say, what little I have to offer,

I'll offer it to you, O Lord. What little I have to offer, I'll offer it to you, O Lord. What amazing things God can do through the power of our little offerings. Who knows, but our littles may result in the greatest revival of Christianity Scotland has ever seen, and then Christ shall have the glory for the growth of His church and the proclamation of His gospel. Let us pray.

[ 30 : 28 ] Lord, we often read in Your Word of people of whom we know little, like Bezalel and Aholiab, and yet You filled them with Your Holy Spirit and with wisdom. And we thank You for people like that, who aren't mere theoreticians, but who are able to grab the vision that You've given and practically express it. And Lord, we pray that whatever gifts You've given us, whatever talents You've given us, whether that's for gaming or for art or for money or for praying or for anything that we are able to do, what little we have, O Lord, in view of what Christ has given us, His everything, we now offer it to You. In Jesus' name, amen.