

God's Generosity, Our Generosity

1 Chronicles 29

We wanted to have some type of celebration at the end of this *Making Room* effort, and so we decided to have a worship service where we could all be together in one room. It's been many years since the church has been able to worship together in one room on a Sunday morning.

We thought it important to hit the "pause button" and to celebrate what God has done to date through our *Making Room* effort. Just to be clear, we aren't celebrating what ***we've*** been able to do through this effort; we aren't celebrating ***our pledges*** or ***our plans*** for expanding our facilities or ***our commitment*** to reaching people for Christ. We're celebrating what God is doing in our midst.

The passage of Scripture that brings all of this into perspective for me better than any other is 1 Chronicles 29. There are numerous parallels between their experience and ours. This chapter records how the people gave generously to fund the building of the temple - just as you have given generously to our building expansion. This chapter also records how David prayed in response to their generosity - which is the same position in which we find ourselves this morning. We are at a place of responding to God in light of the generosity we've been able to demonstrate during this *Making Room* campaign. David's prayer captures very poignantly what we should be expressing to God this morning. His prayer gives us a grid for how we should think and pray in light of where we've been and where we're going.

Here's what we're going to do: We will look briefly at the generosity of the people in giving to the temple (as we've just been told about your generosity in this *Making Room* effort). Then we'll adopt David's prayer as our own. After each of the three stanzas we'll pause and express to God the same things that David expressed to God.

Noticing whole-hearted generosity toward God (29:1-9)

In the first few verses of chapter 29 David details how generously he had given from his own treasury: gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and precious stones. Then he asked the people to give. He actually asked them to "consecrate themselves to the Lord" (v. 5) by their giving. He didn't merely want their gold and silver; he wanted their giving to be a personal expression of devotion to God.

Verse nine summarizes how David and the people responded when they saw how whole-heartedly the people had given:

9 Then the people rejoiced because they had offered so willingly, for they made their offering to the Lord with a whole heart, and King David also rejoiced greatly.

They hadn't merely given to the temple; they had "made their offering to the Lord with a whole heart."

It may make you a bit uncomfortable to hear someone come right out and say, "You have offered willingly and whole-heartedly and generously to the Lord during this *Making Room* effort." But we should be instructed by the fact that if David and the people hadn't noticed what they had given, they wouldn't have "rejoiced greatly" - they wouldn't have found satisfaction in God. That's really the point of having this celebration service: rejoicing in the Lord. We asked you very directly to seek God on this issue and to respond to His leading, nothing more and nothing less.

We are so very encouraged that you have done this. You've not only given/pledged willingly. We've heard reports about how this effort has challenged you to take seriously the Lordship of Jesus Christ over everything in your life: your money, your time, your energy, your relationships. Such whole-hearted response is a reason to rejoice.

The next ten verses record David's prayer in response to the way people had given generously and whole-heartedly. First, David says in verses 10 through 13. . .
"God, all riches and honor come from You." (29:10-13) This is the basic idea of "stewardship": everything we have belongs to God; we are merely stewards (or trustees) of what we "own."

10 So David blessed the Lord in the sight of all the assembly; and David said, "Blessed are You, O Lord God of Israel our father, forever and ever. 11 "Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O Lord, and You exalt Yourself as head over all.

The Chronicler piles up attribute after attribute of God in order to express that God alone is great and powerful and glorious. To God alone belongs "the victory" and "the majesty" and "the dominion." He is acknowledging God's sovereignty in order to put their own prosperity (and therefore their own generosity) into its proper perspective.

12 "Both riches and honor *come* from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone. 13 "Now therefore, our God, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name."

Verse 12 acknowledges that any "riches and honor" that David and the people possessed had come from God. There is no such thing as a "self-made person." God alone makes people great and gives them strength. If God had not blessed them with gold and silver and precious stones, they wouldn't have a thing. Paul made a similar point in 1 Corinthians 4:7 when he asked, "What do you have that you did not receive?"

This is a foundational conviction for each of us: "God, all riches and honor come from You." As an exercise, think about your material riches, your financial assets, your

wealth. Think about your career/job (if you have one), any authority or status you might have, any influence you have in the lives of others. Every single good thing you have was given to you by God. Paul said, "I am what I am by the grace of God." Even though he worked HARD as an apostle, everything he was and everything he had was a gift from God.

Prayer: God, all riches and honor come from You.

If all riches and honor belong to God, it only follows that David would say:
"Our generosity comes *from Your hand.*" (29:14-16)

14 "But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? For all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given You.

David was blown away that he and his people had the capacity to provide so generously for the temple. Their generosity wasn't a source of personal pride; David was humbled by it all because he understood that everything they had came from God. I love the way David "connects the dots" between God's ownership of everything and their capacity to be generous. The only reason they could give generously to the temple was because God had given generously to them.

Their generosity was all the more remarkable, David says, because their life is so transitory.

15 "For we are sojourners before You, and tenants, as all our fathers were; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope.

Some translations end the sentence with "and there is no abiding place." David was very aware that there is nothing stable or permanent about people and nations. The people of Israel were very transient. The fact that their days on earth were like a shadow made their generosity all the more remarkable.

16 "O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided to build You a house for Your holy name, it is from Your hand, and all is Yours.

C.S. Lewis puts this principle into perspective when he writes:

"It is like a small child going to its father and saying, 'Daddy, give me sixpence to buy you a birthday present.' Of course, the father does and is pleased with the child's present. It is all very nice and proper, but only an idiot would think that the father is sixpence to the good in the transaction."

God wasn't more wealthy because the people had given so generously. He was pleased with their generosity, but they had only given "from His hand." The exact same thing is true of our generosity.

Like a few of you, I've been part of this church since the "early years" (the late '80s). Some of us can remember when we numbered 20 or 25 on a Sunday morning and our yearly budget was \$40,000. When I see what's been pledged to the *Making Room* campaign, my response is David's: "Who am I and who are these people that we should be able to offer as generously as this?!? All things come from You, and from Your hand we have offered back to You."

Honestly, it's a humbling thing to be able to offer as generously as this. I'm part of a list-serve of other E Free pastors who serve in churches about our size. Some of these churches are in communities that have been hit hard by the latest economic downturn. This past week one pastor wanted input on how to go about laying off staff because their giving just isn't sufficient. Our community has been effected by the recent downturn; but it's the grace of God that has allowed us to continue moving forward with ongoing ministries as well as this building expansion. We shouldn't conclude that God is more pleased with us than with churches who are struggling financially. It's just evidence that God has entrusted us with enough to move forward.

Prayer: God, our generosity comes "from Your hand."

"Continue to give us willing hearts." (29:17-19) I love how David looks to the future and understands that the goal wasn't merely to build the temple. He understood that if the hearts of Solomon and the people weren't "fully God's" that the temple would be just a building. In fact, 200 years after the temple was build the people's hearts were far from God and the temple became a liability; it gave the people a false sense of security. Jeremiah would warn them (Jeremiah 7:4):

4 "Do not trust in deceptive words, saying, 'This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.'"

David anticipated that people might think that just because God had promised to dwell within the temple that how they lived their lives didn't matter. And so David prayed that God would continue to draw their hearts to Himself.

17 "Since I know, O my God, that You try the heart and delight in uprightness, I, in the integrity of my heart, have willingly offered all these *things*; so now with joy I have seen Your people, who are present here, make *their* offerings willingly to You.

Both David and the nation of Israel were in a great place heart-wise. For His part, David was able to say that he himself had offered willingly. He was actually able to say that he had "integrity of heart" - there was nothing deceitful or shady about **what** he had given or **how** he had given it. [For a polar opposite example, see Ananias and Sapphires in Acts 5:1-11; they wanted to appear a lot more generous than they actually were.]

As well, David took great joy in the fact that the people had also “made their offerings willingly” to God. They hadn't offered “grudgingly or under compulsion” (2 Corinthians 9:7); they had been “cheerful givers.” And I take great joy in being able to say the same thing that David did. As far as I know, Brenda and I followed the Lord's leading and feel great about what we've pledged; nobody forced us to do anything - we are giving willingly. And I can say the same thing about you. We've heard story after story about how willingly and eagerly and creatively you've pledged and given to the *Making Room* effort. I really hope that you have experienced deep satisfaction in seeking God and giving to this effort.

But we've said all along, “What's the point of ‘making room’ in our facilities if we haven't made room in our hearts?” What good is a larger worship space if we're not worshipers? What good is a prayer room if we aren't devoted to prayer? Why make more room for children and youth and people far from God if we don't have hearts of compassion and if we aren't inclined to invest deeply in people?!?! Similarly, David knew that a temple was of little use unless the people's hearts were inclined toward God. And so he prayed this:

18 “O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, our fathers, preserve this forever in the intentions of the heart of Your people, and direct their heart to You; 19 and give to my son Solomon a perfect heart to keep Your commandments, Your testimonies and Your statutes, and to do *them* all, and to build the temple, for which I have made provision.”

David knew that it's very natural to begin a project with a very God-centered focus but to drift into selfishness or pride. The human heart is “prone to wander” as we sometimes sing. And so David prayed that the “heart of the people” would be inclined to God and that Solomon would have “a perfect heart to keep [God's] commandments.”

We need to keep praying these things for ourselves as well. There's a healthy fear of becoming prideful or self-satisfied with nicer and larger facilities. But fear shouldn't dominate our thoughts of the future. We should be full of faith. We should pray as David did: “God, continue to give us willing hearts.” Since this *Making Room* effort isn't an end in itself, we should assume that that God wants to answer that prayer and keep our hearts sensitive to the things He cares about the most.

Prayer: God, continue to give us willing hearts.

Notice the ***response of worship*** in verse 20.

20 Then David said to all the assembly, “Now bless the Lord your God.” And all the assembly blessed the Lord, the God of their fathers, and bowed low and did homage to the Lord and to the king.

In light of everything we've talked about this morning, let's follow their example: “Now bless the Lord your God.”