

Joy and Freedom in Giving
1 Chronicles 29

As an eight-year-old boy, I experienced firsthand the power of money. We were living in east Tennessee at the time. One day I was in the laundry room in the basement of our house when I noticed a dollar bill lying on the counter. My mother always checked the pockets of our pants before doing the wash; you wouldn't want to have a half-eaten candy bar gumming up washing machine. Apparently my dad or one of my brothers had left a dollar bill in his pocket. Mom had put it on the counter. I don't really remember what I was thinking when I saw that dollar bill. I just took it. I wanted it so I took it. Of course my mom noticed that it was missing. Instead of launching an investigation or "shaking us down," she simply announced, "We aren't going to Gatlinburg tomorrow unless the person who took the dollar bill from the laundry room returns it."

That was a low-down, dirty, rotten trick because few things were as greatly anticipated as a trip to Gatlinburg: salt-water taffy, hillbillies, mountain music, etc. After a few hours of agonizing and soul-searching, I miraculously "found" that dollar bill behind a box of detergent in the laundry room. My mom didn't shame me or even let on that she knew what I'd done, but that experience made a lasting impression on me. I don't think I've ever stolen anything since that day. But as an eight-year old boy, the dollar bill lying on the counter was too great a temptation to resist. Even at that young age, money had a type of power over me; that dollar bill turned me into a thief and a liar.

Most of you can relate to what I'm saying. Money has a strange power over us. Even if all of our needs are being met, we subtly think, "I need more money. I'll be happier if I have more money. I'll be more secure if I have more money." And with that mindset, giving is a stressful exercise. Giving to the local church or to missionaries or to other ministries or giving directly to the poor is like giving away your security and giving away your happiness. Have you ever felt that tension? Have you ever wanted to give but you felt more fearful than joyful?

Today we are going to look at an example of giving in the Old Testament that can give us a very different mindset toward money and toward giving. We are going to see a people who were able to give joyfully and freely because they viewed their wealth in the larger context of God's provision and God's ownership of everything. Their theology of money and possessions was very practical; it gave them the freedom to give from the heart.

As we look at this passage, ask yourself the question, "How would my life be different if I thought about money and giving the way the people of Israel in David's day did?" I want you to consider the possibility of finding great joy and freedom in giving. 1 Chronicles 29 gives us a compelling picture of what our lives could be. We'll look at a portion of this chapter today.

Joy and Freedom in Giving. Let me set the context. King David had wanted to build a temple for God. The temple would replace the tabernacle which was only a portable tent where God was worshiped. The temple would be the permanent home for the Ark of the Covenant and the focal point of Israel's worship in Jerusalem. But we read in 1 Chronicles 28:3 that God had told David, "You shall not build a house for My name because you are a man of war and have shed blood." (See also 22:8.) Apparently God didn't want His temple associated with war and/or

conquest; it was to be a house of prayer for all the people. And so David's heir, Solomon, would have the responsibility of building the temple. David, however, made all of the necessary preparations so that Solomon would be able to begin building as soon as possible after David's death.

The first nine verses of chapter 29 record how generously David gave and then how generously the people gave. They gave fantastic amounts of gold, silver, brass, iron, and precious stones. Scholars have calculated the amounts given in terms we might understand: David and the people gave over 300 tons of gold, over 600 tons of silver, 675 tons of brass, and 3,750 tons of iron. These contributions were more than enough to supply the builders.

Verse 9 comments:

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.

When it became obvious how generously they had given, "the people rejoiced" – they were legitimately filled with joy at what they had done. They had offered willingly (no manipulation or arm-twisting was necessary). They had made their offering to the Lord (not to David or not to impress their neighbors). They had contributed with a whole heart (not half-heartedly or grudgingly). It was an incredibly satisfying thing to realize that they had been united in their giving to the temple. And so they rejoiced.

This is the same reaction many of us had when we saw the final giving numbers for the church for 2007. We rejoiced greatly because you/we had given so generously. At the end of November we let you know where giving stood for the year; we let you know what the need was. Consequently more was given in '07 than in any year in the history of the church; we met our needs and then some. That's an incredibly satisfying thing. We've experienced the same satisfaction that David and the people experienced.

David's prayer in verses 10 through 19 expresses a theological understanding of their giving – really a theological understanding of their ability to give so generously. David begins by acknowledging God's greatness and God's ownership over everything. If you really believe that God owns everything (including your "possession" and your "assets"), you look at giving from a very different vantage point.

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. 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.

David begins by praising God for His greatness, power, glory, victory and majesty. God is omni-everything. Indeed, God owns "everything that is in the heavens and the earth"; nothing is outside of His dominion. There isn't a square inch of real estate that doesn't belong to God.

There isn't a dime in a bank account that He doesn't ultimately own. That being the case, it only follows that David would say in verse 12, "Both riches and honor come from You . . . it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone." David understood that any riches and any honor that we might have are derived riches and honor; our riches and honor are not inherently ours; they have been given to us by God. This is the biblical concept of "stewardship": God owns everything; what we have has been entrusted to us by God to use wisely.

Having seen how generously he and the people had given to the temple, David is compelled to ask this question:

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 couldn't get over how generously they had given toward the temple. In his mind, being able to give generously was a function of how generously God had given to them. "For all things come from you, and from Your hand we have given You."

C.S. Lewis put forth a scenario in *Mere Christianity* to illustrate this very point:

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 [i.e., richer] in the transaction. (*Mere Christianity*, p. 110)

In other words, the father wasn't richer because his child gave him a present; the gift came from his own hand. In the same way, God had given the people of Israel an abundance of wealth to contribute to the temple. And in the same way, God was pleased with their contributions because they acknowledged "from Your hand we have given You." They "got it."

This is a good litmus test whether or not we really believe this concept of stewardship (that God has entrusted us with money, but it really belongs to Him). One person may only give lip service to the idea that God is the "possessor of heaven and earth" (Genesis 14:19-22). For that person, everything s/he gives is a supreme sacrifice – taking money out of my account and putting it into God's account. Another person really believes, "Everything I have came from the hand of God." That person honestly says, "All things come from You and from **Your** hand I have give back to You."

We shouldn't let the fact that we work hard for our money confuse the issue. Every talent we have, every ounce of drive and energy we have, every break we've gotten comes from God. Paul asked the question in 1 Corinthians 4:7, "What do you have that you did not receive?" The answer, of course, is "nothing."

Notice in verse 15 how David never forgot that they were "sojourners" in this world:

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.

They had been in the Promised Land for hundreds of years and lived in permanent houses, but

they were still “sojourners” before God; they knew that their days on earth were like a shadow. They knew that they would soon leave this earth along with any possessions and assets they had accumulated.

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.

Again, David saw their abundance as a function of God’s generosity, not of their own power and ingenuity (not their “protestant work ethic”). And David understood that giving was a matter of the heart. He understood that it is possible to give – even generously – for the wrong reasons. Notice how David expresses it in verse 17:

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.

David took God seriously. He actually believed that God scrutinized his heart and knew whether or not his motives were pure. David was able to say that “in the integrity of my heart [I] have willingly offered all these things.” David was able to say, “. . . with joy I have seen Your people . . . make their offerings willingly to You.” Again, there was no arm-twisting and no manipulation in order to get the people to contribute to the temple. They believed in the cause and therefore they gave willingly. They gave with great joy and great freedom.

That’s really the way it still works today: when we believe in the mission/vision of a church or if we believe in a missionary endeavor or if we are moved by compassion to give to the poor, we give with great joy and freedom. We don’t feel like we’re giving away our security or our happiness because we now have less money. We feel like we’ve made the best investment we could possibly make.

This is what we’re “going for” here at Faith: we want you to be whole-heartedly committed to the mission of this church. Churches use different terminology to talk about “mission” (which is ultimately the great commission). We talk about our mission in terms of “helping people come to faith in Jesus Christ and experience God in all of life.” All of the ministries of this church should help fulfill this mission. I’d like to unpack this statement just a bit . . .

God has called us to help people come to faith in Jesus Christ. We do this in a variety of ways. We live open lives; we let others see our relationship with God. And we then explain the life we’re experiencing. We serve the people around us, showing the love of Christ in practical ways. We share Christ through ministries such as Alpha, giving people a place to have honest conversation about the claims of Christ. We do this in other parts of the world through missionaries who seek to lead people to Christ and establish local churches. In many different ways we seek to help people come to faith in Christ.

Once people come to faith in Christ, we want to help them experience God deeply in every area of life. This will mean, first of all, that ~~we~~ we seek to experience God in every area of our lives. The goal of the Christian life isn’t merely to “get good” at a short list of religious activities such as prayer and Bible study and sitting in rows on Sunday mornings. The goal is to experience God in every area of life: in relationships, in our families, in the workplace, in our finances, in

the midst of suffering, in food and drink. And so we as a church worship and pray and cultivate relationships with one another to help each other experience God in every area of life. As *we* are experiencing God in all of life, it's a natural thing to reach out to others and help them do the same.

This is the mission to which we are called. A whole-hearted commitment to this mission will show up in several different ways.

- It will show up in the way we serve and use our gifts. "I'm not only going to 'fill a slot.' I am going to invest myself, trusting that God will use me to lead people to Christ and experience Him in all of life."
- It will show up in the way we pray for the church. Instead of the church being an afterthought in our prayers, we should cry out for God to move in our midst and to use us in powerful ways.
- It will show up in our relationships. We really cannot be what the NT says a church should be without deep, committed relationships.
- This whole-hearted commitment will show up in our giving. Instead of giving "if there's anything left over" or "if I feel like it," we give as a foundational commitment. We give willingly (not under compulsion), we give proportionally (those who make more give more), we give regularly (instead of sporadically), we give as an act of worship (it's not like paying the power bill). We give in order to help the church pursue our God-given mission.

And so giving is only one of several ways that we should be whole-heartedly committed to God through the church.

If you are not yet a follower of Christ, we don't have any expectations that you'll give financially to the church. To the contrary, we really want you to *receive*, not give: we want you to receive the life that Jesus offers. Jesus died on the cross so that you might experience forgiveness and cleansing from your sin, so that you might be fully alive to God, and so that you might fulfill the purposes for which you were created. This isn't anything you earn or achieve; it is something you receive. By faith in Jesus' death and resurrection, you accept the gift of life that Jesus offers. If you're not a follower of Christ, we really want you to receive before you ever give.

And if you are a believer and are visiting here at Faith, we certainly don't expect you to give financially either. But if you do consider Faith to be your church home – whether you're a student or a senior citizen, whether you make a little or a lot – we'd like to invite you to give to the ministries of this church with the same spirit that characterized the people of Israel in David's day. God wants us to have the same type of unity that they had, the same type of joy that they had, the same type of freedom that they had. We believe that's best for the church; we believe that's best for the individual believer/family. We invite you to give with joy and freedom.

Perhaps you've never really thought too much about giving. Or perhaps you're under so much financial stress that you can't really see how you could begin giving to the church (or to other ministries). If you're spending as much or more than you make each month, it's hard to give joyfully; it's hard to experience the type of satisfaction in giving that we've been talking about today. One thing we've begun offering to help people get to a better place financially is the GoodCents financial course. The next course is on February 10th and 17th. This course is for everybody, not just for those who are struggling financially. But if you are under financial stress, I'd encourage you to consider taking that course in order to get some practical help. By

the grace of God, you *can* get to the place where you experience God in your finances. One aspect of experiencing God in our finances involves giving: having the satisfaction of giving wholeheartedly to the Lord as we've been discussing today.

When we give, we want to be able to say, "Who are we that we should 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."