

Heart-level Giving

Exodus 25 & 35, 2 Corinthians 9:7

For a long time I've had a bit of dread about a major "building project" here at Faith. First, most people don't become pastors because they love talking about money and building buildings. Most people become pastors because they want to serve God in the context of a local church. Buildings are generally seen as a "necessary evil." I've come to see buildings a bit differently now: while a building certainly doesn't determine whether or not a church follows God well, a building can either hinder or help a church live out what God has called it to do. I'm actually excited about the plans for our building expansion and how God might use this building to further His purposes.

Then there are the stereotypes about churches and pastors: *"Churches just want your money and pastors are out to build their own little kingdoms."* I mentioned in another gathering that one of my nieces had seen a big, new church building in my hometown and commented to my brother, "Daddy, have you seen Six Flags over Jesus?" Those perceptions and stereotypes about churches and pastors make me skittish about these things.

But I figure that we have two options when it comes to others' stereotypes. One option is to expend great amounts of energy trying at all costs to avoid others' stereotypes. But that's a rather lame way to live your life. The other option is to simply follow what you understand to be God's leading - even if it involves raising money and building a building - and be as transparent, honest, and humble as possible. That's basically what we're trying to do with this Making Room effort.

We spent three weeks talking about the vision for "Making Room" - both in our facility and in our lives. This is the last of three messages on money and giving. Two weeks ago Brian taught about sacrificial giving, looking at the poor churches in Macedonia gave out of their poverty. Last week we considered Jesus' parable about the rich man who built bigger barns; he was rich on earth, but he wasn't rich toward God. We saw how we can be rich toward God if we invest our material resources to further His kingdom. It doesn't matter whether you have a little or a lot; you can be "rich toward God" when it comes to your finances!

Today I want to give one last perspective on giving to the Making Room effort that I hope gives you great freedom. We are going to look at some Scriptures in the book of Exodus that illustrate how people were encouraged and allowed to give as they were "moved in their hearts." Moses was commanded by God to make contributing to the tabernacle a voluntary thing.

I'm eager to explain this example because it's really the pattern we're following in this Making Room effort. We're simply laying out the vision for this expansion, and then we're asking you to seek God and then follow His lead. Honestly, we only want you to do what God has laid on your heart - nothing more and nothing less.

A Case Study in Giving: Heart-level Contributions to the Tabernacle (Ex. 25 & 35)

Let's look at the first two verses of Exodus 25. Moses has already gone up on Mt. Sinai and received the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) and other instruction from the Lord. Moses came down and recounted to the people everything that the Lord had said (24:3ff). Moses went back up onto Mt. Sinai alone, and after 40 days and 40 nights the Lord spoke to him again. Exodus 25 through 31 describe in some detail everything required to build the tabernacle (which was a portable place of worship), the furniture in the tabernacle, and the clothing for the priests.

You might expect that God would tell Moses to **require** that every person and family give to this effort. But notice the emphasis on giving "willingly" in 25:1-2.

1 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Tell the sons of Israel to raise a contribution for Me; from every man whose heart moves him you shall raise My contribution.

The NIV translates the last sentence, "You are to receive the offering for me from each man whose heart prompts him to give." The materials for the tabernacle would be supplied solely by those whose hearts prompted them to give. Understand that the heart doesn't operate independent of God. To the contrary, those who walked closely with God had hearts that were "fully His" (2 Chronicles 16:9); the people were to love God with all their heart, soul, and mind (Deuteronomy 6). Because God moves in the hearts of His people, God simply directed Moses to make giving for the tabernacle a matter of the heart.

The presupposition was that they would have plenty if everyone followed what they were prompted in their hearts to give. Moses was supposed to communicate the need (gold, silver, bronze, fine linen, goat skins, ram skins, porpoise skins, acacia wood, etc.) and then receive contributions from those "whose hearts prompted them to give."

When you think about it, even the required offerings could either be given willingly or under compulsion. But the contributions for the tabernacle would all be given willingly - as each person's heart moved them to give. God didn't want people to give "grudgingly or under compulsion" to use Paul's terminology in 2 Corinthians.

As I mentioned, chapters 25 through 31 describe the types of offerings that would need to be supplied for worship at the tabernacle. But chapter 32 describes how while Moses was on the mountain getting instruction on worship at the tabernacle, the people (at the base of the mountain) worshiped the "golden calf." **That** worship also required offerings/contributions. We read in 32:2 . . .

2 Aaron said to them, "Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring *them* to me."

The people responded and Aaron fashioned a golden calf and said, “This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.” The next day they had a huge “feast to the Lord” that involved sacrifices and celebration. Meanwhile, on the mountain, God told Moses what the people were doing and threatened to destroy them all. Moses interceded for the people; God responded and promised to scale back His judgment. When Moses gets down from the mountain, he smashes the tablets of the Ten Commandments at the base of the mountain. Eventually the people repent and the covenant is renewed (chapter 34).

When we come to chapter 35 Moses finally has the opportunity to address what will be needed for the tabernacle. Let’s pick up the narrative in verse 4:

4 Moses spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, “This is the thing which the Lord has commanded, saying, 5 ‘Take from among you a contribution to the Lord; whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it as the Lord’s contribution: gold, silver, and bronze. . .

After the idolatry of worshiping the golden calf and the subsequent judgment of God, you might expect that Moses would **guilt** them into making contributions to the tabernacle: *You’ve blown it so badly that you owe God big-time. So pull out your gold and silver and porpoise skins and give them to the Lord!* Yet Moses was true to God’s instruction; contributing materials for the tabernacle was voluntary. Contributions were made from those who were “of a willing heart.” If you didn’t have the will to give, you didn’t have to give.

On the one hand, this seems like a risk. What if only a handful of people had a willing heart? What if they only got two gold earrings and one porpoise skin? Again, I think the presupposition was that if everybody followed the promptings of their hearts, they would have plenty and everything needed for worship through the tabernacle would be supplied. It’s not as if God is sitting back passively; God would actively move in people’s hearts.

Notice the response beginning in verse 20:

20 Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel departed from Moses’ presence. 21 Everyone whose heart stirred him and everyone whose spirit moved him came *and* brought the Lord’s contribution for the work of the tent of meeting and for all its service and for the holy garments. 22 Then all whose hearts moved them, both men and women, came *and* brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and bracelets, all articles of gold; so *did* every man who presented an offering of gold to the Lord.

Look at verse 26:

26 All the women whose heart stirred with a skill spun the goats’ *hair*.

And verse 29:

29 The Israelites, all the men and women, whose heart moved them to bring *material* for all the work, which the Lord had commanded through Moses to be done, brought a freewill offering to the Lord.

We have every indication that God was satisfied with the entire process. Because everybody whose heart moved them to make a contribution did so, they had plenty. This attitude toward giving is found in the New Testament as well. In 2 Corinthians 9:7 Paul encourages the Corinthians to give to the collection for the poor at Jerusalem in this same spirit.

7 Each one *must do* just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

God loves it when people give what they've been prompted to give in their heart. God loved that the people in Moses' day followed the prompting of their hearts and gave willingly to supply what was needed for the tabernacle.

How does this example apply to our Making Room effort? As with the collection for the tabernacle, we're really trusting that God will move in our hearts and lead each of us in our giving. The last thing we want is for you to feel pressured or obligated to give. As Mitchell Foot has mentioned on numerous occasions, we want this to be the best giving experience that this church has ever had.

We've put together some informational packets for the *Making Room* effort. We have twenty teams of people (individuals and couples) who are in the process of sharing this information with individuals and with life groups. We'll have a couple of open meetings the next couple of Sunday mornings for those who haven't already receive a packet. As well we'll mail out packets to those who haven't been at any of these gatherings. We leave the information with you, ask you to pray and seek God concerning what (if anything) He would want you to give. Then we're asking you to return a response card to indicate God's leading. As with regular giving to the church, everything is confidential; nobody but those working directly with receipts know what anybody has pledged or given.

Following the example in Exodus, we're asking you to engage this issue on a heart-level. Instead of a superficial approach (e.g., picking a number out of the air), we're really asking you to seek God (through prayer, meditating on Scripture, talking with the appropriate people in your life, etc.) in order to discern what God would have you give. Then we're simply asking you respond as He leads.

Our deep conviction is that if each of us in the church follows God's leading and gives whatever we are "moved/prompted in heart" to give, this *Making Room* effort will be exactly what God wants it to be. Whether God leads you to give a lot or a little or nothing at all, we only want you to follow God's leading. Please believe me when I say

that if you aren't in a financial situation to give anything at all or if you aren't prompted in heart to give anything at all, that's completely fine. You don't need to explain or justify yourself to anybody at all; it's completely between you and God what you give.

This week I asked several people in the church how they seek God when it comes to this type of giving. There's no formula to follow, right? It's not like the tithe in the OT that you were required to give (sometime it even says "pay"). It's a freewill offering of whatever your heart prompts you to give - which isn't always easy to discern. I thought it might be helpful for the *Making Room* contributions as well as discretionary giving in general.

One couple said that when an opportunity arises, they talk about it, then they spend a few days evaluating their finances and each praying separately about what they should give. Then they each write a number on a piece of paper and come back together to see if they each have the same general amount in mind (which is usually very close). Other couples would tell you that one person's number is usually twice the other person's number.

Another person said that when an opportunity to give arises, he makes it a "top shelf" issue and spends a considerable amount of time praying and meditating on appropriate Scriptures. His advice is to "never give more than you can give joyfully." This is in line with 2 Corinthians 9:7 - being a cheerful giver. If you make a three year pledge that you can't give joyfully it will be like grabbing an electric fence and holding on for three years. That's not the will of God.

One person said that he and his wife simply talk and pray about what they'll give. He said that they want it to be a three-person conversation between the two of them and God. They've found real unity through this approach.

God's leading doesn't have to be such an analytical process. God can communicate His will in all different ways. One person mentioned that when she heard about how much this effort would cost that her heart sank. But then the thought came to her mind, "first fruits" - which is the idea of giving from the first of what you have instead of from the leftovers. God gave her an idea on how she could do that.

Hopefully these examples stimulate your thinking about how you might seek God concerning what you might give. A common theme involves entering into God's presence, asking for His leading, and then listening. I'm convinced that God is very committed to leading when we are committed to seeking Him.

I'd just like to share one last thing about giving (to the Making Room effort or in general). Someone shared this with me last week. It really puts in context everything we've said about giving over the past three weeks: ***Our worth isn't in what we can give.*** You aren't worth more to God if you give a lot; you aren't worth less to God if you can't give a thing. Giving is important in our discipleship. But our worth comes from Jesus' death and resurrection.