

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

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Exodus 35:4-29 “Principles of Giving”

(Also Exodus 25:2; 36:2-7; Haggai 1:14; 2 Cor. 8:1-4, 8, 12; 9:7)

Intro. Last Sunday I shared with you the prophet Haggai’s message to Israel. They had returned from captivity, laid the foundation of the temple, but for 15 years they did nothing about building a house of worship. They were too busy tending to their own affairs to build the Lord’s house. And so God sent Haggai the prophet to speak to the people. He called upon them to consider their ways, and stop postponing the rebuilding of God’s temple.

Well, the people responded to the prophet and obeyed the voice of the Lord and started building the house of the Lord. In v.14 we see a major reason why the people responded. There we read, “So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God.” Notice that the Lord stirred up the hearts of the leaders, so that they wanted to lead out in this building program. Then God stirred the hearts of the people so that they would want to follow their leaders to build this house unto the Lord.

So this morning I want to lay a spiritual foundation as we proceed with our Together We Build program. I pray that whatever is done over the next several weeks will be the work of God in the hearts of people. When we accomplish great things for the Lord, let it not be said that it was done through cleverness, or manipulation. I pray that what is done here will be so clearly the work of God through His people that He alone will be praised and glorified. Later in the message I will talk more about God’s role in stirring the hearts of His people to accomplish a great work. I will also share what we must do to experience the stirring of God in our hearts.

Now turn back to Ex. 25 and I will show you a few early examples of the Lord stirring the hearts of His people to freely give. There we move back in time to the construction of the tabernacle. Although God Himself could have provided everything needed for the tabernacle, He chose to involve all of the people of Israel in donating the materials needed. God does not want to rob us of the blessing of having a significant part in His work. So first main point I want to make is this:

I. WE SHOULD GIVE WILLINGLY

Israel had been saved out of slavery for only a few months, yet the Lord asks them to make a contribution to help build the tabernacle. In Ex. 25:2 God said, “Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring Me an offering. From everyone who gives it willingly with his heart you shall take My offering.” Notice that the main stipulation was that it was to be a free-will offering. The Lord had already given the 10 commandments and many other laws, but now He does not lay down a law regarding giving, but asks for free-will offerings. Almost the same words are repeated in 35:5ff. One thing that was added in that chapter was the call for “gifted artisans” to come & work on building the tabernacle. Both their gifts and their services were to be freely given. Likewise, 2 Cor. 8:12 says regarding giving, “For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted....”

We are getting close to beginning a great work for God here at our church. Our largest building project yet will be initiated & completed only if God's people respond with sacrificial gifts. But we will follow an important principle of Scripture. Our gifts must not only be sacrificial, but also freely given. So I want us to consider this principle more closely. The Word of God teaches that our gifts and service should be given:

A. Not Grudgingly, Reluctantly, or Under Compulsion – The Israelites in the wilderness did not give unwillingly. They did not have to be begged and urged to give. They gave spontaneously and freely. The New Testament certainly proclaims the same truth. Look over to 2 Cor. 9:7, “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.” Literally, it is “not out of grief.” No one is to be sorry for letting anything pass out of his hands saying, “I am sorry I gave so much.”

You know, a good salesman can get most people to buy something they don't even need. He can get most people to pay more than they would elsewhere. He knows just what to say to get you to hand over your money. Well when it comes to giving, we are not going to use manipulation or sales techniques. We don't want anyone to feel any undue pressure. We want you to give willingly and cheerfully, for that is the teaching of the Word of God.

Furthermore, v.7 says that nothing is ever to be given “of necessity,” from a feeling that one is forced to give, that he is being robbed. No one is to think: “They took advantage of me; they shall not do it again.” This truth is also stated in 2 Cor. 8:8. There Paul was speaking of a special offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem. And Paul said concerning the offering, “I speak not by commandment....” No one had to give. They were to give willingly.

Did anyone come to church grudgingly, or under compulsion today? Did anyone contribute to the offering grudgingly, or under compulsion? If so, what does that say about you? It says that your heart is not in it. Could it be that there is something wrong with your heart? To help you answer that question, consider this: When do you not want to eat? Only when you are full or sick, right? Indeed, one symptom of sickness is loss of a desire to eat. Even so, if you do not desire to worship, or serve the Lord, or give to the Lord, it may mean that you are spiritually sick!

Now this is how we should give to the Lord:

B. Freely & Cheerfully – In Ex. 35:21-22 we see how the people responded to the call for willing gifts, “Then everyone came whose heart was stirred, and everyone whose spirit was willing, and they brought the LORD'S offering for the work of the tabernacle of meeting, for all its service, and for the holy garments. They came, both men and women, as many as had a willing heart, and brought earrings and nose rings, rings and necklaces, all jewelry of gold, that is, every man who made an offering of gold to the LORD.” V.29 says, (read). The willingness of the people to give was given special mention. What we see happening in Exodus must have been similar to what we read about hundreds of years later when it was time to build a temple for the Lord. When people gave gifts for Solomon's temple, they gave cheerfully and joyfully. 1 Chron. 29:9 says, “Then the people rejoiced because they had offered so willingly, for they made their offering to the Lord with a whole heart....” Willing giving is cheerful giving. In many ways this was a foreshadowing of the way God works in the New Testament. Again, 2 Cor. 9:7 says, “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.” There, the Greek word translated “cheerful” is *hilaron*. And there is emphasis in the Greek on that word. God loves a hilarious giver. The offering time should be the happiest time of the worship service! That

trusting of men's giving to spontaneous liberality was exceptional under the law. It is normal under the Gospel.

This principle also applies to our service. Look back at Ex. 36:2, "Then Moses called Bezalel and Aholiab, and every gifted artisan in whose heart the LORD had put wisdom, everyone whose heart was stirred, to come and do the work." This was not a "job" to them. They were not watching the clock. They were not building the tabernacle because they had to work. They had been slaves in the past and here they were slaving again, but this time because they *wanted* to. Their hearts were in their work. That is the way you are to do God's work.

When it came time for Gideon to lead an army to fight the Midianites, 32,000 men answered the call to arms. But the Lord didn't want that many men to fight the battle, lest they say that they won the victory by their own strength. So the Lord had Gideon ask if any of the men were fearful, or just wanted to go home. God did not want unwilling soldiers. Most took advantage of that opportunity & left. Only 10,000 remained to fight. Then, when the 10,000 were commanded to drink water, God did not choose those who leaned over the edge and lapped it up, but the 300 who dipped their hands in the water and brought it up to their mouths, watching for the enemy. They were ready and willing to fight at any moment. Those are the type people God can use: those who are ready and willing. None but volunteers make up the army of the Lord.

So it is clear that everything we offer to God must proceed from hearts made willing by His Spirit. It must be spontaneous, not the result of external pressure, but from the heart. Now if you do not *want* to give to enable us to expand our facilities, you need to ask why not? Why will so many gladly give, but others either refuse to give, or give very reluctantly?

Are we willing to depend upon willing sacrifice? A large number have had no faith or too little faith in freewill offerings. So instead of depending wholly on the Lord to motivate His people to give voluntarily, they use a little or a great deal of pressure, or begging, or they stoop to worldly fundraising methods. Many may think that if you are going to raise very much money, you need to pressure or manipulate people, or motivate them by giving special offers or recognitions. The appeal to lower motives is often tempting.

Let me give you a practical reason why we should depend upon free-will offerings to build this building. This principle can help demonstrate whether or not a ministry or large expenditure is truly of the Lord. If the Lord gives a work to do, He Himself will lay it upon the hearts of His people to contribute what is necessary. If we do not see a great demonstration of willing sacrifice over the next few weeks, then we will be wise to stop and re-evaluate the timing of our building program.

II. WE SHOULD GIVE GENEROUSLY

You might question the effectiveness of a free-will offering. Remember, they were fresh out of slavery. They had never owned anything before. However, when they left Egypt they departed with quite a bit of wealth. You see, after the 10 plagues, the Egyptians were so glad to rid the land of the Israelites that they gave them whatever they asked. God commanded the women to ask their Egyptian neighbors for articles of silver, gold, and clothing [See Ex. 3:21-22]. God granted them favor and Israel left with a great deal of wealth. Now that they finally had some riches, you would think they would not be so willing to give it away.

But that was not the case with the Israelites. They gave liberally, joyfully, and enthusiastically to their God. Notice the bounty of what they gave. In 35:22 we read, "They came, both men and women, as many as had a willing heart, and brought earrings and nose rings, rings

and necklaces, all jewelry of gold, that is, every man who made an offering of gold to the LORD.” They also gave fine cloth, skins, silver, bronze, wood, precious stones, spices, and oil. Many of these gifts were valuable. In fact, they gave so much that they had to tell them to stop giving! (36:3-6). I believe this is the only place in the Bible where people were told to stop giving. Someone has estimated that the value of the tabernacle its furnishings would amount to about \$5 million today!

One reason so much was given was because they gave generously. Now is not the time to be stingy. However, another reason so much was given was because so many responded to the call to give. It was a nationwide effort. And if we are going to be successful in our *Together We Build* campaign, we need for *many* to respond with willing, generous gifts. If only a few give, we will not be able to build.

So the main thing I am asking you to do is to do your part. If we will all just do our part, we will be amazed at how much will be committed to this building project. We have a great church. You can have a part in doing something that will have lasting significance in our community.

III. WE SHOULD GIVE RESPONSIVELY

What would make a person give willingly & generously? After all, people tend to either hold on to their money, or spend it on themselves, not give it away. First of all, we should give:

A. In Response to the Prompting of the Spirit of God - A number of times in the Old Testament we read of God stirring the hearts of His people to build. We have already seen this truth in Ex. 35:21, 36:2, & Haggai 1:14. Then in Ezra 1:5 we read of, “...everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up and rebuild the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.” In Zech. 4:6 God told the governor, “Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit.” In the context we see that God was talking about rebuilding the temple. The Spirit of God would work in the hearts of the people to bring it to pass.

There are many Scriptures in the New Testament about God’s work in us. God is still stirring hearts to do His will. Phil. 2:13 says, “For it is God who works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.” Did you understand that? Paul is saying that God will work within to cause us to be willing to do His will. Eph. 3:20 says, “Now unto him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.” In 2 Thess. 3:4 Paul said, “And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you.” His confidence was not in the flesh, but in the Lord. We will start building our new building if God is in it, and if so, we can count on Him to provide, by stirring the hearts of His people to give.

We will build if God stirs our hearts. And God works in response to our prayers. Our *Together We Build* campaign started with a call to prayer. I hope you have been praying about your own commitment. I hope that you are praying that God will stir the hearts of His people to give what we need for this new building. There is only one method of securing the gladness and spontaneousness of devotion and of service, and that is, living very near to Jesus Christ through prayer, Bible reading, and obedience. And by means of prayer for others, we can see God work to stir others to voluntary service and stewardship. Again and again Paul prayed for others with the firm belief that God would work within them by this Spirit and by His Word to cause them to do His will. If we are going to see a great demonstration of willing sacrifice in our church, it will only come through prayer for one another! So let us rely upon God’s Spirit to move upon the hearts of His people to accomplish a great work for Him.

B. In Response to the Love of God – Love will motivate people to do far more than they would from any other motivation. Who is going to take better care of our children: a loving mother, or a paid day care worker? The answer is obvious. There are some good day care workers, but still, no one is going to love & care for a child like a loving mother. Love is a powerful motivator for service and giving. 1 John 4:19 says, “We love Him because He first loved us.” As we contemplate God’s love for us, we respond with love back to God. And true love gives. True love serves. True love obeys. Jesus also said in John 14:15, “If you love Me, you will keep my commandments.” Wherever the spirit is touched with the sweet influences of God’s love, that spirit is buoyant, lifted, and raised up. Thankful love is the true motive for voluntary giving and service.

God had shown His love by redeeming the Israelites from slavery, and the people of Israel responded with grateful giving & service.

C. In Response to the Word of God – Last week we saw the marvelous results when Haggai preached the Word of God. The people were stirred into action. They resumed rebuilding the temple. Indeed, the Word of God is powerful. Heb. 4:12 says, “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword...” Paul said in 1 Thess. 2:13 that the Word of God “...effectively works in you who believe.” That is why I am preaching 4 sermons from the Word of God on principles of stewardship, and building up God’s work. Next Sunday our S.S. teachers will teach a stewardship lesson from the Word of God. If we will teach & preach God’s Word, God will work in our midst, and we believe that God’s people will respond.

We are indeed to respond to the Word of God. James 1:22 says, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.” Will you respond to the Word of God, and give?

D. In Response to the Example of Others - One thing that God used to stir the people to give and work was the example of others. All the gifts did not come in at one time. Notice in Exodus 36:3, “...So they continued bringing to him freewill offerings every morning.” As the Israelites realized what others were doing, they wanted to have a part in the building of the tabernacle as well. Different people gave according to what they had, and they served according to the abilities that they had. In 36:25-26 we see that the ladies were involved sewing and working together.

The apostle Paul realized the positive influence that others can give. Look over at 2 Cor. 8:1-4. There he tells of the willing sacrifice of the Macedonian Christians. This was in spite of the fact that most of them were poor (v.2). Then in v.8 he says, “I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others.” The “others” referred to are the Macedonian Christians. They were very willing to make a sacrifice because of their Christian love. Paul was using their example to challenge the Corinthians. Then he reminds us of the greatest example of giving there is. Christ was very willing to make a great sacrifice on our behalf. In v.9 he said, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” I believe that the Corinthians were motivated to respond by the example of others.

So I want you to understand the importance of a positive example. That is the main reason why we are asking different people to give their testimonies. Not so that they can brag about what they are going to do for the Lord, but so that others will want to have a part in what so many others are doing. If you have been asked to give a TWB testimony, I hope you understand how important your testimony is. This is also the reason why we are asking some of you to make advance commitments. Your example will inspire others.

Along these lines, I do want to make an appeal. If you do not want to give or make any commitment to *Together We Build*, that is between you and the Lord. We do not want to pressure you to give, for God wants willing gifts. But if you are not going to give or make a pledge, keep it between you and the Lord. Don't tell anyone else. Don't discourage others from doing what they feel the Lord would have them to do. If you are not going to be a positive example to others, then be silent about what you are *not* going to do!

IV. WE SHOULD GIVE BY FAITH IN GOD'S PROVISION¹

One important principle of Scripture is this: What God calls us to do He enables us to do, if we trust Him. This principle applies to giving or service. God knew that He would be calling on His people to build a tabernacle with gold furnishings. So He provided the means to accomplish it.

Remember that God said that the Israelites would come out of Egypt with great wealth (Gen. 15:14). They worked hundreds of years as slaves, and so God made sure they collected their back wages before they left Egypt. So in the final analysis, it was God who provided them with wealth. Later, God told them in Dt. 8:18, "but remember that the Lord your God gives you the power to gain wealth..." So when it comes to giving, don't just look at your own resources. Consider the resources of God.

In his book *He Has Made Me Glad* (InterVarsity), Ben Patterson talks about the Amazon River, the biggest river in the world. Its volume is greater than the Mississippi and Nile combined. In the early days of European exploration, ships would sometimes be caught in the doldrums for days in the Amazon's ninety-mile-wide mouth, thinking they were still out to sea. Supplies would run low, water would be gone, and sailors would die of thirst. At times the sailors had no idea of the vast quantities of refreshment all around them. The same is true of us. So often we think that our supply is exhausted, when the provision of God is so great. So if God leads you to give generously, you can be sure He will supply what you need to fulfill your commitment.

Now if God leads you to give to our building campaign, you can count on Him to provide the means whereby you can fulfill your commitment. And you can count on God to help you provide for the needs of your family as well. And when you consider how good God has been to you, you should give out of gratitude. That's what the Israelites did. God had blessed them with so much wealth when they left Egypt. Many were glad to return to God part of what He had blessed them with.

Just as God blessed Israel with wealth, even so God has blessed America with wealth. Do you think that He has done so just so we can enjoy it ourselves? Don't you think He has done so with a higher purpose in mind? Should we give generously to support the Lord's work? And since He has provided so well in the past, can't we trust Him to replenish our supply?

Conclusion: The task before us is huge, but we serve a big God. Imagine the joy we will experience if on victory Sunday we announce that we have surpassed our glory goal of \$995,000! We can and we will if we give willingly, generously, responsively, and by faith in God's provision.

I hope that when you have the opportunity to make your commitment to our *Together We Build* campaign, that you will give based on the principles of giving that I have shared with you today. If you are a Christian, but you have not been receiving our TWB mailings, then that means you are not on our list of members & regular attenders. If you want to have a part in a great work for God, if you want to join us in making a commitment, then you need to let me know during this

¹ This same topic is covered in my next sermon in this series.

invitation, or you need to call our church office. We will send you the materials, and add you to our mail list so that you will receive a commitment card as well.

I have been talking today about willing gifts, and willing service. I want to close with another application. We must also give our hearts to Jesus willingly. God will not force you to be saved. You must choose Christ. Will you give your heart to Him today? In a context talking about giving, 2 Cor. 8:5 says, “And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.” If you are not saved, God is not looking for your money. He wants you to give your heart to Him first. Let Him change your heart, and then He will change your desires. He will change your life. Do it today! Don’t delay.

Sources: R.C.H. Lenski, *Interpretation of I & II Corinthians* (Augsburg Publishing House, 1937 & 1963); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 1 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1981); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings in Exodus* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972); Douglas K. Stuart, *New American Commentary: Exodus* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).