

# *Following In David's Footsteps*

A Message Offered by  
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*The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. ... You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity.*

*2 Corinthians 9:6-8, 11a NRSV*

A local United Way office realized that it had never received a donation from one of the town's most successful citizens. The woman in charge of the campaign called the man to persuade him to contribute: "Our research shows that out of a yearly income of at least \$500,000, you give not a penny to charity. Wouldn't you like to give back to the community in some way?"

The man mulled this over for a moment and replied: "First, did your research also show that my mother is dying after a long illness, and has medical bills that are several times her annual income?"

Embarrassed, the United Way rep mumbled, "Um...no." The man continued: "Or that my brother, a disabled veteran, is diabetic and confined to a wheelchair?"

The stricken United Way rep began to stammer out an apology. The man interrupted her apology, saying: "Or that my sister's husband died in a traffic accident," the man's voice rising in indignation, "leaving her penniless with three children to raise on her own?!"

The humiliated United Way rep, completely beaten, said simply, "I had no idea..."

On a roll, the man cut her off once again: "...So, if I didn't give any money to *them*, what makes you think I'm going to want to give any money to *you*?"

I don't run into many people like this in the church. If I did, I'd be nervous right now. I'd be thinking, "these people look nice, God, but they just might stone me." But that hasn't been my experience. Most people I know want to invest generously and confidently to God's work, they just don't know how. So they give safely or sheepishly or reluctantly or fearfully. But that's no fun, and that's not what God wants. God doesn't want people making an offering out of guilt or obligation, saying "Fine, God, take it, *it was yours anyway...*"

If we want to become cheerful givers, we can learn a lot from today's second lesson. In it, King David is at the end of his life. He has been on an amazing journey with God – he knows God's grace personally and profoundly – and now he has the opportunity for one last great act of devotion. He wants to build a proper house for God: a temple. His son, Solomon, is going to lead the construction. All that is missing is the money to do it.

*King David said to the whole assembly, "My son Solomon, whom alone God has chosen, is young and inexperienced, and the work is great; for the temple will not be for mortals but for the LORD God. So I have provided for the house of my God, so far as I was able, the gold for the things of gold, the silver for the things of silver, and the bronze for the things of bronze..."*

*Moreover, in addition to all that I have provided for the holy house, I have a treasure of my own of gold and silver, and because of my devotion to the house of my God I give it to the house of my God: three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver, for overlaying the walls of the house, and for all the work to be done by artisans, gold for the things of gold and silver for the things of silver. Who then will offer willingly, consecrating themselves today to the LORD?"*

*Then the leaders of ancestral houses made their freewill offerings, as did also the leaders of the tribes, the commanders of the thousands and of the hundreds, and the officers over the king's work. They gave for the service of the house of God five thousand talents and ten thousand darics of gold, ten thousand talents of silver, eighteen thousand talents of bronze, and one hundred thousand talents of iron. Whoever had precious*

*stones gave them to the treasury of the house of the LORD, into the care of Jehiel the Gershonite.*

*Then the people rejoiced because these had given willingly, for with single mind they had offered freely to the LORD; King David also rejoiced greatly.*

*I Chronicles 29:1-6*

Did you hear that? The people *rejoiced* when they gave; and David, who gave the most, rejoiced *greatly*. There was no weeping or gnashing of teeth that day. There was no guilt or embarrassment as they went forward with their offerings. They gave with joy. Great joy. What was their secret?

### **They Gave Courageously**

They gave courageously, *beginning at the top*. David had a vision of what he wanted to do for God. It came to him one day while he was sitting in his palace with fine cedar paneling. There he realized that his house was nicer than God's and he thought that there was something wrong with that. (At that time God was still being worshipped in a portable tent or tabernacle.) But he didn't stop there. David took the next step: he took personal responsibility for making the dream a reality. Lots of folks have dreams. Very few of us do anything about them. David acted. Boldly. I bet he wasn't the first to see the need, but he *was* the first to do something about it. It takes courage to go first, doesn't it?

When David took that first courageous step, something miraculous happened: the rest of the people followed with equal courage. They could have sat back and said, "he's got more money than us, he should pay for it all." But they didn't. They could have said, "It's his dream, let him build it." But they didn't. Instead, they caught David's vision and in following *him* they became leaders *themselves*: their deputies followed and so on down the line until *every* person had a chance to invest in the project.

We have some courageous leaders in this congregation, too. Following David's example, they've taken us over half-way to the \$800,000 mark. Courageous leaders make what once seemed *impossible*, possible. Willing *followers* make what is merely *possible*, inevitable. Come on. Let's finish the job.

### *Each Gave as They were Able*

The second key to their joy that day was that every person gave, according to their unique circumstances. The amounts of the investments that day varied widely, I'm sure. The Bible tells us that David gave 190 tons of gold and 375 tons of silver, which, adjusted for inflation, is almost enough today to buy a tank of gas.

It's safe to say that David's was the biggest gift that day. But it was not necessarily the most important one. In this kind of project, every investment is vital. Consider the Space Shuttle. Millions will watch as it takes its last flight next month. It has over one million parts, some of them costing hundreds of millions of dollars, but lack of a just one properly functioning O-ring brought one down back in 1986. Without your investment – however big or small -- we can't get where we need to go.

The *ultimate* goal of this campaign isn't a flat dollar amount: it's everyone giving their very best. Exactly how much each of us can commit is a personal decision between each one of us and God; but everyone can do something.

Whether your contribution will be spent on fixing leaky windows, or paying off the mission house mortgage, or creating an exciting place for youth and their friends downstairs, I don't know. But I can tell you this: every investment in *Onward* is going to help us to minister more effectively. When we're commemorating a departed friend's life in our newly refurbished Rotunda or welcoming new members because of ministries we started with money that used to go toward the debt—it will be because of what all of us did, together, through *Onward*.

If we're going to give with joy, we have to be realistic about our ability to support God's work. No matter how excited we are about being part of *Onward*, we can't give what we don't have; and no one is asking you to. Everyone has different resources.

Most of the time, though, we underestimate our resources. If you look closely at the lesson you'll see that David gave *two* gifts, really. The first gift was from his ordinary income. The second one was from his *segullah*. David says, “in addition to all these things I have given, I have a treasure of my own...” – in Hebrew, “I have a *segullah*” — “out of which I am also giving.”

*Segullah* is a word that refers to the king's private treasure or nest egg. It was his personal rainy day fund for times of rebellion or disaster. When David made his commitment that day, he didn't just give from his cash on hand; he dug

much deeper than that; *he gave from his segullah*. He mortgaged his personal security in order to build a proper house for God. [Source: RSI Sermon Resource]

I suspect that we all have some kind of *segullah*, a treasure of our own that we're saving for a special purpose or a rainy day. Only you can decide if now is the right time to break it out, put it to use, and trust that God will provide for you in the future as he has in the past.

Some of you know that Kari and I tithe; ten percent of our income goes to God's work, most of it right here. At the same time our family is growing and our expenses are growing, too. There's not a lot left at the end of the month. And then *Onward* comes along. *Onward* is something that is really important to our family. We know how important the work is if this congregation is going to keep moving forward. For us to invest over and above our regular giving we're going to have to dip into our *segullah*.

When my dad died he left everything to my mom, to provide for her, as he should have. But it turns out that he also left some savings bonds in my name that he had bought quietly, regularly, over the years, a little at a time, every paycheck. I guess he was buying them for me for a rainy day.

Well, it's raining in God's house (or at least it's leaking!). So Kari and I are going to use those savings bonds. There's a lot of good things we could do with that money, but this allows us to do something that is going to have lasting—and even eternal—value, and you don't get to do that every day. Our gift won't be the biggest investment in *Onward*; but it's the biggest one the Gibelius family can make right now – and that is all God asks of us.

What's your *segullah*? Ask God to help you to see the resources all around you. Ask God if now is the time to break open that treasure chest and let blessings pour out.

### ***They Gave for the Right Reason***

A third key to their joy that day is that they knew *why* they were giving. David told his leaders from the get go, “this house isn't for people, it's for God.” It's not about our comfort and our reputation—it's about God and God's glory. Each person who gave that day did it for God, not for themselves or even their own families. David was an old man when he made his commitment. As best we can tell from the Bible, it was his final act. He knew he wouldn't live to see the Temple completed. He gave anyway.

Some of us may not live to see all of the *Onward* work completed—it's going to take a few years. And some are probably thinking, “my kids are grown and gone, I don't work in the kitchen, my carpets at home are stained beyond recognition, too, I don't care about new members (we've got too many people anyway)...” Ok, fine. I get it – you don't see what's in *Onward* for you. But in the end, discipleship isn't about you, or me, or anyone else, is it? It's about God and what God would do through us.

Next week is *Onward* Sunday. We need about \$325,000. It may seem like a big number, but it doesn't scare me. We're up to the task. Yes, we're only human and this building is only brick and mortar. But that's like saying that communion is just any meal and baptism is just any water. When God's Spirit and God's promises are added to ordinary things and ordinary people, *extraordinary* things happen: we eat holy food, we become holy people, we stand on holy ground. In this building and in this congregation lives are changed and God's will is done.

Every person has something of a giving sweet spot – the point where God's need and our resources come together perfectly—it's not too much; and it's not too little. It's just right. That's the point where we give with joy. Find that spot for you and your family this week. It will take courage to get to that spot – this isn't “safe” giving; for most of us it will feel like a stretch to commit over and above our usual giving. And getting there will take a creative assessment of all of our resources, not just the obvious ones. And we'll probably have to remind ourselves at several points along the way *why* we're giving: it's about becoming part of what God is doing right here, right now. This week, let's follow in David's footsteps.

Would you pray with me? *Thank you, Lord, for this opportunity to serve you and your people. Help us to see how we can give with joy. Give us courage to trust our finances to you. Help us to find resources that match our desire to give. Help us to rise to the occasion and give with glad and generous hearts. We want to do this for you and for your glory. And we pray that our cheerful giving brings you great joy. Amen.*

*Dear Friend,*

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