

Characteristics of Joyful Giving: A Stewardship Study of 1 Chronicles 29:1-20

Ronald D. Roth

[The author is the director of the Ministry of Planned Giving of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. He headed the synod's special Lift High the Cross offering.]

Why is giving to the Lord not a more joyful experience? Here are four possible reasons:

- **Giving is often associated with a crisis.**

When do we hear the most about money in the church? When the treasurer is having trouble paying the bills. Often at such times the message of the church is heavy law with a sprinkling of gospel. By intent or by circumstance guilt is aroused, and guilt feelings are far from joyful.

- **Sometimes the church can appear to be an ungrateful beggar.**

For some reason those of us involved in the institutional church tend to operate on the premise that our organizations are entitled to charity—like the beggar who stationed himself every day near the office of a wealthy businessman. The beggar had received fifty cents a day from the businessman over a long period of time. The businessman went out of town for a week. When he returned, he passed the beggar, who said to him with a slight tone of reproach, "You owe me \$2.50."

Not even the institution of the church is entitled to charity. Institutions must earn and attract *investment*.

- **Members may view their giving as paying bills.**

Analyze year end giving. Some members give a large portion of their annual offerings in December because until year's end they do not know what their annual income will be. Some have other reasons, such as, waiting to hear how much the church needs to be able to end the year in the black. There is little connection between such giving and the cross of Jesus. It is more in the order of paying a bill for services received and there's no joy in paying bills.

- **The devil, the world, and sinful flesh are opposed to giving.**

The devil tells us, "God is not worth it." The world says, "I am worth it. Buy, borrow, trade, and get all of me that you can." And from inside we hear, "You owe it to yourself. Go ahead and indulge." The struggle can be fierce, and under the influence of the unholy three our giving at times can reflect their values rather than those of the divine Trinity.

A foundational truth, however, is that God wants us to experience joy in our giving. His promise to us is, "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor 9:7). 1 Chronicles 29 is an account of joyful giving. It is the story of King David amassing the materials for the Temple to be built by his son Solomon. The chapter also records David's prayer of thanksgiving prompted by the generous response of the people. It is an insightful illustration of many characteristics of joyful giving and of many New Testament stewardship principles. It is worthy of our study and meditation.

Characteristics of Joyful Giving

1. Joyful giving desires the best that man can give for God.

"... my son Solomon, the one whom God has chosen, is young and inexperienced. The task is great because this palatial structure is not for man but for the LORD God" (v 1).

When young Solomon ascended the throne of Israel, he was confronted with tasks of immense importance—judicial intricacies, legislative entanglements, diplomatic relations, military leadership, economic development, and a multitude of government affairs. David wanted Solomon to understand, however, that his number one task was the building of the Temple. This palatial structure would be the symbol of God's sovereignty and sustaining presence. In it forgiveness, peace, and hope would be proclaimed and received by God's people. It was to be the focal point of Israel's life, its place of spiritual enrichment. David wanted it to be the best.

God's people today too need to be encouraged to desire the best for God. They don't want to feel that they are just "giving away" their money. They want to believe that they are investing it. They need to be helped to see that their offerings enable the church to do the most precious work on earth of proclaiming God's Word and making disciples. Rather than asking them to fund a deficit or a budget, let us ask them to make the best investment they can in the kingdom of God.

2. Joyful giving is generous.

"With all my resources I have provided for the temple of my God—gold for the gold work, silver for the silver, bronze for the bronze, iron for the iron, and wood for the wood, as well as onyx for the settings, turquoise, stones of various colors, and all kinds of fine stone and marble—all of these in large quantities. Besides, in my devotion to the temple of my God I now give my personal treasures of gold and silver for the temple of my God over and above everything I have provided for this holy temple: three thousand talents of gold (gold of Ophir) and seven thousand talents of refined silver for the overlaying of the walls of the buildings, for the gold work and the silver work, and for all the work to be done by the craftsmen. Now who is willing to consecrate himself today to the LORD?"

Then the leaders of families, the officers of the tribes of Israel, the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, and the officials in charge of the king's work gave willingly. They gave toward the work of the temple of God fine thousand talents and ten thousand darics of gold, ten thousand talents of silver, eighteen thousand talents of bronze and a hundred thousand talents of iron. Any who had precious stones gave them to the treasury of the temple of the Lord in the custody of Jehiel the Gershonite (vv 2-8).

From his personal treasury David gave 110 tons of gold and 260 tons of silver. These are such precious metals that traditionally they are priced by the ounce, not the ton.

The leaders of Israel were inspired to be generous too. They gave 190 tons and 185 pounds of gold, 375 tons of silver, 675 tons of bronze, and 3,750 tons of iron. All who had precious stones gave them also. Enough precious materials for a palatial structure indeed!

Most Christians want some guidance regarding how much to give—the more specific the better. "Whatever you can do" is a recipe for failure. It suggests that the organization is ambiguous about the whole enterprise.

Many Christians and church members also prefer to be asked for *enough*: enough to reflect their God-given capability and enough to really get the job done. Christians who are motivated by the love of God are more likely to be embarrassed by a request to give less than is really needed or less than they are really able to give than by a request to give more.

When church members understand that they are associated with the most important work on earth, they genuinely want to make investments that will help to assure the continuation—and growth of that work. It is our task in the church boldly to encourage our members to give as much as possible rather than to consider, "How little can we get by with?"

3. Joyful giving is willing to be an example.

Then King David said to the whole assembly. . . "Besides in my devotion to the temple of my God I now give my personal treasures. . . They (the leaders) gave toward the work of the temple. . . The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the Lord (vv 1,3,6,9).

David loved the Lord and wanted the best for the Temple. He knew it would be good for the leaders to give as he had given. He was a willing example and an inspiring example. The leaders responded in similar fashion. The reaction of the people was not the negative caricature often feared: "Look who's showing off." It was rather what is to be expected of God's people; they rejoiced that God had given them such fine leaders.

When we lay on the hearts of our fellow Christians the responsibility that so heavily rests on ours, when our earnestness and example give convincing evidence of how seriously interested we are, when we make it clear that we know they are no less willing to do what they are capable of doing than we, that we feel sure that all they need is to realize the importance of the enterprise and the urgency in order to lead them to do their full share in meeting it then we have made them our friends and have brought them to think of giving as a privilege and not a duty.

4. Joyful giving is a response to being asked.

". . . Now who is willing to consecrate himself today to the Lord?" (v 5).

This could have been viewed as crass manipulation. "Look what I did. Now what are you going to do?" It wasn't. It was accepted by the leaders as a service that helped them to decide how much they would give.

When we ask fellow Christians for money, we are friends, not adversaries. We are counselors, not salesmen. It is not a game of predator and prey. We are encouraging God's people to do something significant for their Lord and his kingdom. After all, we are not asking for anything for ourselves.

Asking is a courtesy; it says, "I believe that you are interested and want to give." Asking is a helpful guide, especially when there are so many worthy causes to support in God's kingdom and God's world. Most of all, asking is an encouragement to give the matter current and careful attention.

5. Joyful giving views giving as a means of consecrating oneself to the Lord.

"... Now who is willing to consecrate himself today to the Lord?" (v 5).

To consecrate is to set oneself apart as holy in service to the Lord. David says that giving money to the Lord is an act by which Christians give a part of themselves in service to God.

That is true because our money represents a part of us. We have it under our management because we have spent our time, effort, and skills for which we have been paid. Money is compensation or replacement for that part of self that has been expended.

Money is more than cold cash or purchasing power, therefore. It is a part of us in exchange for a part of our past life. It is a wonderful creation of God by which we can take a part of our life which is gone and still have its benefit today. It is a means by which we can express our love and our Christian values. That is why we use portions to provide for loved ones and self. When we give that money to continue the march of God's gospel through the world, we are giving ourselves! It is a proof of faith and love. It is an act of sacred, meaningful worship. As we help fellow Christians better understand and practice this, we help them experience true joy in giving.

6. Joyful giving gives willingly and wholeheartedly.

"I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things have I given willingly and with honest intent. And now I have seen with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you" (v 17)

1 Chronicles 29 does not give us the time frame in which the various events occurred. Obviously, it was not all done in a day. First were David's decisions regarding his giving, then the assembling of the leaders and asking them to give. Then the leaders had to make their decisions and to bring their gifts. Finally, the story of this giving was circulated throughout the nation. When the process was completed, it seems as though David called for a "national day of thanksgiving" on which occasion he offered this beautiful prayer.

Experience teaches us that the act of meaningful giving is frequently, if not always, a process including several steps. When informed of an opportunity to support the work of God's kingdom and when asked to respond generously as we are able, very often we first experience the inner struggle between the sinful nature and the new man of faith. Then comes the emotional decision, "Yes, I will give." This is followed by the rational decisions about how much, what, and when to give. And then comes the joy!

To give leftovers and unneeded dollars can be very easy. To give willingly and wholeheartedly at the approximate level of which we are capable is seldom if ever easy. Strong gospel motivation is essential. We need to recall the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who became poor so that we through his poverty might become rich (2 Cor 8:9). Examples of others and a vision of kingdom work to be done are also important. So, too, is time. As the old adage says, "You can't make a good pickle overnight just by squirting a little vinegar on a cucumber. It takes awhile." Understanding this helps us to continue to help and encourage one another.

7. Joyful giving is thankful acknowledgement of God's greatness and ownership of all things.

David praised the Lord in the presence of the whole assembly, saying, "Praise be to you, O LORD, God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and

honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all" (vv 10-12).

David had given money from the nation's treasury. He and the leaders had given from their personal treasuries. All understood, however, that it was really God's money that they were returning, and they were thankful to have received it and to be able to give it.

When you and I ask fellow Christians to support God's work, we need to remember these truths. We have a long tradition in the Christian church of treating asking for money like begging.

Whose money are we asking for? Not yours or mine, and we are not asking for it for our benefit either. It is God's! When we ask people to give, we are not asking them to give up something they possess. We are really asking them to evaluate again their management of God's money. And that is a service, a worthwhile ministry.

So very often thankfulness is the key. There is much in Scripture about God's ownership of all and his generous distribution to us. This is a message which today's Christians need to hear regularly. It is a message that develops thankfulness, and thankful Christians are generous and joyful Christians.

8. Joyful giving considers it a privilege to give.

"Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name. But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand" (w 13,14).

"We need to go confront those folks with their responsibility. When they joined the church, they promised that they would support it." Loyal members are strongly tempted to club those lacking in loyalty with the heavy weight of the membership vows.

This approach should be rejected. It represents an institutional approach in which there is often little or no room for law and gospel.

God could have chosen others and other ways to fund the work of his church. Instead he has chosen us.

We pray for daily bread, and God gives us abundance. Why? Because, as the Apostle Paul says, we are made rich in every way so that we can be generous on every occasion (2 Cor 9:11).

Christians who hear and delight in the promises of God's provision, Christians who understand that they possess what they do not own, Christians who see that they are to manage 100 percent of their possessions according to God's will are Christians who are willing to listen to and respond to the message of firstfruit giving and proportionate giving. For them giving is not so much responsibility as it is privilege. Paul calls it a "grace" and urges us to excel in it (2 Cor 8:7).

9. Joyful giving comes from a humble spirit that recognizes man's poverty and undeserving nature.

"We are aliens and strangers in your sight, as were all our forefathers. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope. O LORD our God, as for all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name, it comes from your hand and all of it belongs to you" (w 15,16).

In part, David's prayer refers to Israel's forty years of wandering in the wilderness and to God's gift to them of the promised land. They were aliens and foreigners living in houses they had not built and eating produce from fields and orchards they had not developed.

It is also a reference to their spiritual odyssey and a reminder to us of ours. By nature we are estranged from God. Through faith in Jesus Christ we are now beloved children. Without faith in God our lives would be empty and desperate.

With Christ has come everything good—forgiveness, eternal salvation, partnership with God, the great task of disciple making, and, yes, even the abundance of our earthly possessions.

These are foundational truths. In this gospel message we find the power to be loving stewards. These truths need to be proclaimed to us again and again, and we need to affirm again and again that Christ is our life and our salvation.

10. Joyful giving results in the prayer that others too may experience this joy.

"O LORD, God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Israel, keep this desire in the hearts of your people forever, and keep their hearts loyal to you" (v 18).

David knew the spiritual value and joy of giving in his own life. He wanted others to have these blessings too. His prayer, therefore, is most appropriate and understandable.

God has kept the giving spirit alive in the hearts of Christians in all ages. Your hearts and mine are answers to David's prayer and the prayers of countless other Christians.

We pray for the conversion of unbelievers. We pray for workers to bring in God's harvest of souls. Here is another petition that warrants a regular place in our prayers.

Conclusion

Gathering funds for the Lord's work is a ministry in itself as it enables the work of the Lord and enriches the lives of Christians. It always requires prayer, hard work, good planning, careful communication of purpose and need, ongoing follow-up and the Lord's blessing. It is a work that always focuses on God's love for people in Christ and the peoples' need of his forgiveness. It happens best when the church is always hard at work achieving its purpose and when members own, embrace, and support that purpose.

How may we encourage joyful giving on the part of our brothers and sisters in Christ?

- Always do all that we can to help them to use faithfully God's means of grace.
- Pray regularly for the joyful spirit of giving on the part of all Christians.

In addition let us keep in mind that:

- It is important that we remind one another of the greatness and glory of God's work more so than our shortages and crises.

- It is helpful for us to speak of our own giving in humble and joyful ways.
- We are assisting fellow Christians to invest in God's kingdom; we are not seeking charity.
- We ought to ask our fellow Christians boldly and lovingly to give the greatest gifts they possibly can.

God's blessings as you carry out the ministry of enabling Christians to give joyfully!

