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MOTIVATION FOR GIVING Michael B. Beaugh
I Chronicles 29:10-18 April 20, 2008
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In Italy, Teresa and I saw lots of duomos, cathedrals. Came back with lots of ideas for our building project. None of them practical, of course. But who said we can't dream big?

We are not exactly building a duomo, but we are building a structure dedicated to the purposes of God. And just like the construction of the duomos, it will take each one of us doing our part to make it happen.

So in our capital campaign we have been working all the angles for motivation. That's because giving away what we work so hard to earn is not something that comes naturally. Like it says in *Fields of Gold*, one of our basic impulses is self-preservation. Generosity seems like an attack on self-preservation. It is natural to want to keep everything we lay our hands on. If you don't think it is natural, just watch 2 year olds play in the same room, or same house. Everything is mine!

The truth is that some people manage to overcome their reluctance to give and accomplish great things for God by giving freely. On the other hand, some people never accomplish much because they don't know how to give.

In I Chronicles 29, we see an example of a successful capital campaign. Bet you didn't know that capital campaigns are Biblical. King David organizes a campaign for the building of Israel's first temple in Jerusalem, and it seems everyone is motivated to give freely and joyfully. He puts in from his great wealth. And then everyone else gives freely and joyfully, beginning with the leaders and all the way through the lowest person. Eventually, David's son, Solomon, builds a magnificent temple as the house of God and as the resting place for the Ark of the Covenant. For 400 years it functions as the spiritual and religious center of Jewish life.

Fortunately, in I Chronicles 29:10-18, we have David's prayer that he prayed upon the completion of the capital campaign. In this prayer, he reveals to us the things that motivated all the people to give. And really these are the things that empower us to live effective lives as disciples of Jesus. If we want to become life-breathing disciples who make an impact on the world around us, we must grow in generosity.

So let's look at the things that motivate normal people to go against their instinct for self-preservation in order to do great things for God.

I. Is it too obvious to say that generosity begins with God? This is one of the reasons I like our campaign consultant's approach to raising money. It is not about guiltting people into giving. It is not about what we might get out

of it. It is not high pressure tactics to make people do what they really don't want to do and later regret. It is about God. It is about **knowing who it is for**. It is about knowing the One it is for.

The campaign we are engaged in is not for us. It is for the God who created us, redeemed us, and preserves us. What we are creating is space wherein people will gather to experience and grow in the love and power of Jesus Christ. It is space from which we will go into the world to make a difference in people's lives. If I didn't think that would happen in this new building, I would not be interested in giving to it. I wouldn't ask you to give to it.

Actually, I am not asking you to give to the building. I believe God is asking us to give to Him so God can do a new thing through us. This campaign is God's gift of a new direction for our church and for the world. God is inspiring us to grow in generosity so that others may come to know Him and His Son Jesus Christ.

Look at how David begins his prayer. In verses 10-13, he never mentions the building project. It is not about the building. It is about God. David begins by focusing on the greatness of God. "Yours, O Lord, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty." We are doing this for you, O God. We are doing this as a sign of our commitment to you. People will see what we are doing and they will be filled with wonder at your power and grace and presence.

Average people can do great things when they know who it is for and when they know the One it is for.

II. Growing in generosity also takes a bit of modesty. And honesty.

In verses 14-16, David **gives credit where credit is due**. We will never become the generous people God wants us to become until we give credit where credit is due. David asks God, "How is it that we, just average people, are able to make such an offering for the building of the temple?" He answers his own question. Everything we have comes from God. God gives us what we give back to Him. It is not from us. What we give is from God.

This is a remarkable perspective and one that governs our relationship with God. We can call it "return to sender". We don't own anything in the sense that we can never take credit for what we have. I know we all work hard for what we have. We put out a lot of effort to support our families. We feel the pinch when the economy goes down and jobs go away. But the Biblical perspective is that God owns it all, and God gives us the skills and tools and jobs that enable us to produce whatever we have.

The principle is this. *If God wants us to have a new building in which to do new and greater things for Him, He will provide the abundance for that to happen.*

I have seen it too many times. I have seen churches die because they refused to make any plans or proceed with plans because they just couldn't see how they could do it. What they didn't believe is that God will provide the abundance if the plans are from God.

On the other hand, I have seen churches that prosper with life because they proceed on the basis of God's promise to provide all we need if we seek His Kingdom first. *God is interested in daring disciples who are interested in doing greater things for God.* If this is the right thing, God is already at work providing the abundance to make it happen. We just have to look around in our own financial affairs to see the abundance. Or we might look around and discover a new way to make more money. Or we might find a way to cut waste out of our budgets.

I have shared this recently. In a previous church I served, we helped members see that they couldn't even remember where a lot of their money went each month. It slipped through their fingers to buy things that simply didn't matter in the long run. They overspent on things that they didn't really need. In one year, the giving to that church jumped by almost 20%.

God gives us the abundance. We just have look for it. It all belongs to Him. Let's give God a little credit.

III. But still we are not going to be very effective givers until we have an upright heart (vss. 17 & 18). This means a heart rightly related to God, and **a heart that is ready to respond** when God calls. The truth is that we cannot do it by ourselves. Fighting the self-preservation bug is a losing battle on our own. It will happen only by the Spirit of God living in us to empower us to be generous people.

In his prayer, David prays that God will keep God's purposes and thoughts in the hearts of the people forever. I think David sees the great potential in the people when they are rightly open to God's will.

This is why we have been praying, "Lord, what do you want to do through me?" This is the attitude of the upright heart. It is an invitation to God to help us get our priorities straight so we can do something great that will have an impact on the world for generations to come.

In Florence, we were walking along a street looking for a place to eat. It was dark and not many people around. But we heard the sounds of an organ playing and it kept getting louder as we kept walking, until we came to a small church with its doors open. Hadn't even noticed the church before. It was set in a block between stores displaying high end goods. On the door

was a poster announcing an organ concert coming up in three days, so I figured the organist was practicing. The music drew me in like a moth to a flame and inside were several people reverently sitting and listening. There were only a few lights on. A spotlight on the crucifix. A dim light glowing in the apse. Candles burning.

And then I realized what was happening. It wasn't an organ practice. It was a ministry of the church. I sat for a moment and listened and it was like God wanted me there at that moment. As I listened, the contrast between what was going on in that little church and what was happening on the streets was palpable. In the streets, people rushing by, stopping to look in shop windows, souvenir vendors, pickpockets, tourists like us taking pictures on the go. In the church, the voice of God, the eternal, a healing Spirit, warmth, peace. In that one instant, God drew me back to the center. I brushed away tears as I sat there. God spoke to me. We are not just tourists in this world. We are not just sightseers. We are put here for a purpose. It is to share that experience and knowledge of the eternal that has broken through in Jesus Christ and that finds us wherever we are. We are called to respond like that little church doing what it can to offer ministry. An act of generosity that touched my heart.

What does God want from us? Next Sunday, April 27, we are going to gather at the Trophy Club Country Club to celebrate the life of this church. And we are going to consider what God wants us to do as a congregation. With generous hearts, we can make the difference God wants to make through us.