

*Hearts Stirred to Work and Give*

**Exodus 35:20-36:7**

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Let me introduce you to a pair of ancient Hebrews. Their names are Bezalel and Oholiab. They were kind of like the general contractor and the foreman of the crew that constructed the tabernacle or tent of meeting where God would dwell among his people and the people would worship the Lord.

Bezalel and Oholiab weren't the only ones who worked on this project. They were leaders and teachers, but they were part of the whole community that contributed material or labor for building the tabernacle. We saw last week that the church is people, the church is community. That reality is rooted in Israel's experience of being formed into the people of God. All through this section of Exodus, we see that many people did their part to help with this project. Many gave a freewill offering of gold, silver, fabric, wood, and other materials. Others did work. There were women who spun wool and many skilled workers who fashioned the metal and fabric into the large tent and its furnishings.

If you go back into chapter 35 and read on through 36:7, you'll see phrases like "everyone whose heart was stirred," "everyone whose spirit was willing," "all who were of a willing heart," "all the women whose hearts moved them to use their skill," all the men and women "whose hearts made them willing to bring anything" for the work to be done. 36:2 says, "Moses then called Bezalel and Oholiab and every skillful one to whom the Lord had given skill, everyone whose heart was stirred to come to do the work."

That leads me to pray that God would move us, would stir our hearts to work and give.

What was so important about the tabernacle that God would give people all these skills and resources and stir them to work and give? Why were the people so moved to do all of this? The tabernacle, then later the temple, was at the heart of Israel's life. Acknowledging God's presence in their midst and worshiping the Lord God were to be the center of Israel's life. There are at least fifty chapters in the Bible devoted to the construction,

ritual, and priesthood of the tabernacle. No other aspect of Israel's faith receives as much attention in the Old Testament as the tabernacle, its furnishings, the priests who ministered there, and the rituals of their ministry (Maxie Dunnam, *Exodus: The Communicator's Commentary* 299).

The tabernacle was portable—it was a tent. So it was intended for a people on the move. It was the center of the Israelite camp. They organized everything around it. These were people moving in God's purpose and moving toward the fulfillment of God's promises.

The primary purpose of the tabernacle was worship. It represented God's presence with the people. It was a meeting place between heaven and earth, between God and people. It was a place for "hosting the holy" (Walter Brueggemann, *The Book of Exodus: The New Interpreter's Bible*).

It was also a place of atonement where sacrifices were made. Those sacrifices showed the seriousness of sin and were a means for the people to be forgiven. It may be significant that the account of Israel's sin and rebellion in the episode of the golden calf (Exodus 32) is in the context of these chapters about constructing the tabernacle. That's one example of their need for this provision of forgiveness and covering of their sin.

So God gave Moses instructions for constructing, furnishing, and using the tabernacle. God inspired and gifted certain people, like Bezalel and Oholiab, to lead the work. God enabled many people to do the work. God stirred and moved all the people to support the work. The people joined in and used the gifts God gave them because they knew they needed this place to worship the Lord.

What motivates our work and our giving? We can experience God's presence. We know we need to worship the Lord. We need atonement, to have our sins forgiven and to be able to relate to God in the right way. We sense the need for sacred space. All of that makes us willing to enter in and do our part when God stirs our hearts. We are each gifted by God in some way and we want to use those gifts. God entrusts resources to us and we use them to accomplish God's purposes.

The tabernacle's original and specific purpose in Israel was to show God's presence and provide a place of worship and atonement. From the New Testament perspective, the tabernacle's ultimate purpose was to point

to Christ. Remember John 1:14—"the Word was made flesh and dwelt [or tabernacled or pitched tent] among us and we have seen his glory." Jesus is the presence of God with people. He's the meeting place of heaven and earth, of God and humanity. Jesus' death fulfills what the sacrifices in the tabernacle pointed toward. Jesus is not only the sacrifice, but also the great High Priest who brings people to God. Jesus is the place of atonement and the source of forgiveness. He puts us right with God and restores us to God when we trust him.

Jesus speaks of himself in place of the temple. The temple was the center of worship in Jerusalem that replaced the tabernacle after Israel had been settled in the land for many years. Now Jesus takes the place of the temple (John 2:19-22; 4:21-24).

A further development in the New Testament is that after Jesus died, rose again, and returned to heaven, the church is the body of Christ. The church, the people of God in Christ and filled with God's Spirit, represents Christ's presence in the world. But the church isn't only called the body of Christ. We're also called God's temple.

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple. (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22)

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering

spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:4-5)

So we see this shift in the NT from a particular building as the dwelling of God and the place of worship to the whole people of God as God's dwelling. The church is a people for God's name, created to worship God. That's why we exist. That's why we gather here each week. It's nice if we get blessed or feel better or learn something. But those aren't the main reasons for our being here. The reason for our being here is to worship the Lord God.

We not only worship God together in this place, but we also worship God with our lives. That doesn't mean singing hymns all the time or going through certain rituals constantly. A classic confession of Christian faith asks, "What is the chief end of man?"—that is, what is the purpose and goal of human beings? The answer is, "To glorify God and enjoy him forever" (The Westminster Shorter Catechism, <https://www.opc.org/sc.html>). We bring glory to God or show God's glory, greatness, and influence in all that we do. And we enjoy God. Worship isn't always practical; it doesn't always "do" something. Enjoying God is being in God's presence and taking joy in him.

God stirs our hearts to work and give in order to build up the body of Christ and increase the worship of God. That can involve the construction of physical buildings as places of worship. Think about how God gave vision, and provided gifts, resources, and leaders so we could have this building on this site. There's still more to that vision. Think about what we will someday build. Let's trust God to continue enabling us to work and give to pay off this building and to prepare for the future.

What can we learn from Israel's tabernacle about building our lives on the foundation of Christ, being built together as God's temple where God dwells by his Spirit, and about building places of worship? Ellsworth Kalas suggests an outline of this passage in Exodus that shows what's needed for such building (*The Grand Sweep Preaching* 27-28).

First, we see the need for *Inspired People*. Moses described to the people the plan God had given for the tabernacle and told them what

materials would be needed for constructing it. The people went back to their tents and then “everyone whose heart was stirred and whose spirit was willing” brought an offering to the Lord of the various materials that were needed. We always need people whose hearts are stirred and whose spirits are willing to support the church’s ministry. Will we let God inspire us and move us to do whatever it takes to do God’s will, to live as people of God’s kingdom?

Next, we see that there was *Inspired Giving*. The people brought brooches, earrings, signet rings, and pendants. They brought yarn, fine linen, wool, and leather. They brought silver, bronze, and wood. They brought gems, olive oil, and incense (Ex 35:20-29). Eventually, it says that the people brought so much for the work on the tabernacle that Moses had to tell them to stop giving, “for what they had already brought was more than enough to do all the work” (36:5-7). What a great problem to have! What a great example of giving so freely to what God calls us to do that we have more than we need. We can live and give in the confidence of God’s abundance and not the fear of our scarcity.

Building the tabernacle involved *Inspired Workers*. Our two friends, Bezalel and Oholiab, are singled out here. They were filled with God’s Spirit. They were filled with skill and talent, and the gift of teaching so they could show others how to do the work that was needed.

As God allowed his glory to be housed in the tabernacle, he called and equipped a skilled artisan and had him use his artistry to show God’s presence to the people. Richard Foster points out something interesting about Bezalel:

Bezalel worked as an artisan—this was his job, his profession—and it was through his vocation that he was able to demonstrate the presence of God. And note this: he was described not only as a skilled artisan but also as one “filled with the spirit of God.” Now, this statement is all the more impressive when we realize that Bezalel was the first person in the Bible described in this way. “Filled with the spirit of God” is a description first used, not of a priest or prophet or patriarch, but of an artisan, a “blue-collar” worker. Perhaps this will

give us a hint of how much God values the work of our hands.  
(*Streams of Living Water* 248-49)

There was also Oholiab, who's described as "an engraver and designer, and an embroiderer in blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen" (Ex 38:23). And don't forget "all the skillful women" who spun the cloth (35:25-26) and all the people who had "skill and understanding" to do "any work in the construction" (36:1).

I hope you pray for your pastors and teachers to be full of God's Spirit and to have skill and understanding and the ability to lead and teach. We pray for you to be full of God's Spirit and to know what skills and gifts God gives you and that you'll know how to use them to build up the church, to serve. The church always needs people whom God inspires and empowers and gifts to lead the way in ministry, to teach, to care for facilities, to reach out to new people, to encourage others, to care for each other, and all the activities God leads us into.

In the tabernacle construction there was also *Inspired Follow-Through*. I like what Ellsworth Kalas says about this:

After the building of a church is finished, there's need for some inspired follow-through—which sometimes is spelled *drudgery*. [Note that Exodus is followed by Leviticus and that's a big part of what that book is about.] It's also what it means to pay off a mortgage and to maintain a property once we have it. It isn't glamorous, but it is significant; and it is inescapably necessary. (*Preaching* 28)

That's where we are. But all of this applies not just to physical buildings, but to us, the people. If we're to be the people of God, the dwelling of God by his Spirit, whose purpose is worship, then we need to be built into such a people. It's not our natural tendency to make worshiping God our priority. We need to be inspired, stirred, moved by God's Spirit to be the people God wants us to be. We need inspired leaders to help us grow. We need to remember that Christian growth isn't always exciting, jumping from one

high experience to another. It's a daily discipline, following through on our commitment by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We learn from Israel's tabernacle about building the church. We get some insights about constructing a physical building. But we also learn about building a people, a fellowship, the body of Christ, the living temple of God.

I once heard about a Sunday School teacher who closed the lesson with the children in a circle, doing "this is the church, this is the steeple" with their hands. One day, as she asked the children to do that, she remembered with embarrassment that the new child in the class had only one arm. He didn't have two hands to put together to make his church. Just as the teacher was about to apologize, the little girl sitting next to that boy held her hand up to his and said, "Let's make our church together."

That's what we're about here: making the church together as we're stirred to work and give. God inspires and empowers us to make the church together through our prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness.