

"Freewill Giving"

Together We Can Do More, part 2

1st Chronicles 29:10-20

Welcome, friends. You are in the right place today. You are among friends. You are in God's house. And even if you feel out of it today, if you've had a rough week, you have chosen to come here, and I thank you for that choice. Do me a favor: turn to the person next to you and tell them, "No matter what, God loves you." We need to encourage each other. We need each other to be God's church, because together we do more.

Would you join me in prayer? As we pray, I encourage you to lift your hands to God in surrender and prepare to hear God speaking to your heart.

Thank you, God, for your unconditional love for us. Thank you for not treating us as our sins deserve, and sending your only son, Jesus, to be our Savior. We embrace the work of the cross, God, and remind ourselves that we are here to honor and worship you out of gratitude for what you have done for us. Help us to listen, change, and grow, as we seek to spread the glory of your name. This is your church, and we are your people. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

I love to give. Don't you? Especially when (sarcasm alert) my gift is completely involuntary and paid at my own personal expense. For example, I am sure most of you, at some point in your life, made an involuntary donation to a government agency. A few years ago, I paid Calhoun County \$100 in a compulsory donation to their law enforcement agency. A very kind police officer noticed that I failed to completely stop at an intersection. My involuntary

donation was compensation for the fact that I got to see his pretty disco lights on the top of his cruiser.

(More sarcasm!) And I am sure, every April 15th, you all love to make your mandatory donations to the federal and state governments. I'll bet you cheerfully mail your check with a little thank-you note to tell them what a great job they are doing. If you had time, I guess you would personally deliver your money to the US Treasury at 1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C., and put a little extra in as a tip, right?

OK, enough with the sarcasm. Truthfully, as Christians, we absolutely should respect the government, obey traffic laws, and pay our taxes. But my point today is that there is a huge difference between giving under compulsion and freewill giving. There is no law in our church that says you have to give. We do not charge a pew tax. Did you know that some churches once did that? Do you know that in Germany, today, if you want to be a member of a state-affiliated church, you pay a mandatory 12% of your income. That's right, on your 1040's, if you check the box that you are a Lutheran or Catholic, the government automatically takes 12% of your adjusted gross income. Don't ask me what happens to the money after that!

Our churches in the United States, including this church, operate on freewill offerings. Our ministries and missions are funded completely by whatever people are willing to give. Although this is a fundamental process to our churches, do we really know what "freewill giving" is?

Think about the last time you received some money, a present or a paycheck, perhaps. What did you do with it? If you're like me, you probably put it in the bank or spent it. You used it on yourself, because, after all, it's your

money, right? It is a common belief that our money belongs to us. After all, we earn it, so we believe that we deserve it. We identify money as a possession under our control.

However, I want to challenge that assumption today. Do we really own our possessions and our wealth? Is that even biblical? Or does God have a different idea? Let's look at our scripture and find out.

Last week, we read the story of David, Solomon, and the temple in 1 Chronicles 29. King David called the people of Israel together to explain his vision of building a house for God, a permanent place where all of Israel could worship and call on God's name. David told the people that Solomon was too young to do this on his own and needed help. And David gave from his own personal wealth to get the temple started. Then he challenged the leaders to follow his example. The leaders also gave extravagantly, and as a result, the people rejoiced. They were encouraged. They supported this vision, and they were excited. They were of one mind.

So what did David do next? Let's look again at 1st Chronicles 29:10-13. David prayed to God. An amazing prayer. To be honest, I don't pray often enough when I receive a gift, or even my own paycheck. And yet, look how David prays:

¹⁰ Praise be to you, LORD,
the God of our father Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting.

¹¹ Yours, 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, LORD, is the kingdom;
you are exalted as head over all.

¹² 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.
¹³ Now, our God, we give you thanks,
and praise your glorious name. (1 Chron. 29:10-13, NIV)

Those are some powerful words of praise. “Everything in heaven and earth is yours. Wealth and honor come from you, God.” David had his priorities straight. David acknowledged God for who God is and what God has done. God is the source of all wealth.

It’s the second part of the prayer that really challenges me. David asks rhetorically, “Who am I, who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you...” (verse 14) This is almost identical to James 1:17 - “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights...” Freewill giving starts with the biblical truth that everything belongs to God. Nothing belongs to us. Whether you’re a prince or a pauper, an empress or a beggar, God owns it all. God created it, and God bestows it onto us. This runs contrary to what the world says. We are not owners of our possessions. We are stewards, only.

David goes on to say, his people don’t even belong in the land where they live. Look at verse 15. “We were foreigners and strangers...” That sounds like someone who is simply grateful to be alive. “Our days were...without hope.” David is overflowing with gratitude because of how God has allowed the people to have any wealth at all from which to freely give.

After these expressions of praise, thanksgiving, and humility, David makes his request to God. David asks that God would keep this desire in the people’s hearts: to always be joyful, obedient, and generous. (verse 18) David is desperate

to make this giving not just a one-time shot, but a complete lifestyle of obedience to God.

I think we often fail to understand that giving is a critical part of complete obedience to God. Giving is part of our worship. And worship is our reaction to who God is and what God has done for us. David was in awe of what God had given him. Are you also in awe? Do you worship the God of Israel, the God of our nation, who freely gave his own son, Jesus Christ, to die for us?

Think about it. If God gave Jesus to us the way we usually give, the story of the cross would be totally messed up: God the Father comes to Jesus and says, “[Sigh.] Well, I guess I have to let you go down to earth and save them. But there had better be at least a thousand people who start worshipping you, otherwise this is a terrible investment.” NO! Jesus gave his life freely for us. I am convinced that if there had been only one unrighteous person in the world, Jesus would have died for him or her. If you had been the only sinner in history, Jesus would have still sacrificed himself for your salvation. Yet the truth is, we all have sinned, and Jesus died without demanding anything from us in return. Jesus simply offered his love and a chance for us to respond.

In view of that kind of generosity, what is our response? “Oh well. Nice story”? Or do we raise our voices like David and praise God, and say, “We’re not worthy!”

Everything belongs to God. That truth sets us free: Free to love. Free to give. Free to take responsibility for the things God has given us because we know Christ is counting on us to make a difference.

Your giving makes a difference. Your giving enables us to reach our goals and visions for this church. When your gift is freely given in love, God takes it and does something amazing.

The purpose of the United Methodist Church is to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” Specifically, our mission statement at Grace UMC is “to invite all people to encounter and develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ all for the glory of God.” That’s a bold vision. That’s a God-sized project. And truth is, people give to vision, not need. There is a difference in saying, “I need a new car,” and “I need a vehicle so that I can transport myself and my family to the events that matter to us.” As your pastor, I could say, “Your leadership has determined we need \$3,000 each Sunday.” Or, “\$3,000 a week will fully support our ministries, missions, facility and staff, so that God’s name is honored and people outside our walls can know God’s great love.”

Why do you give what you give to the church? Is it just another thing on your to-do list? If you think the church is just another organization asking for money, then your giving won’t reflect anything special. If you think your money belongs only to you, you might still give, but it will be uninspiring, resentful, and dull giving, not freewill giving.

However, if you are connected to God and the Church, your giving will be much different. You will be involved, you will serve, you will have a heart for what God is doing in this place, because you are excited about the vision. You will support it the best that you can.

Freewill giving is not forced, not demanded. It is giving from the heart, because you ultimately recognize that God owns everything. Freewill giving

enable us to expand God's kingdom. Freewill giving shows that you love Jesus and invest in the things that God loves.

Jesus said in Matthew 13:8, "Some seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop-a hundred times what was sown." In banking, that is 10,000% interest. You can't get that good of an interest rate anywhere else on earth. So I encourage you to give. Give to God what is God's. Give with your whole heart. Give because you believe that God will bring about mighty things in your life and in this church. Give freely out of gratitude for all God has done for you.

Please watch this short video on giving as you reflect on what you freely offer back to God. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m932eDLPk9w>

Let us pray.

Mention World Communion Sunday and stewardship campaign letters.

Memory verse

"Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." 2nd Corinthians 9:7

Reflection questions

1. When has someone demanded something from you? (Money, time, or other resources.) What did you give them? Why?
2. Do you truly believe that God owns all of your possessions? What difference does your belief make?
3. What most excites you about giving to a church? What least excites you?
4. What does your giving tell God about the status of your heart?
5. What percentage of your income do you give to the church? If you do not yet tithe, would it take to eventually get there?