



Dear friends,

Many of you were at our congregational meeting last Sunday, so you already know that we voted (80%) to begin a building fund drive, called 'Building for the Future'. Our next step is to see if we can raise enough money to implement the building plan we have been tweaking for the last 8 months. On the first day, right after the vote, we received 9 pledges for a total of \$70,000. What a wonderful start. I have sometimes heard people say that if we all tithed our income (giving 10% of all that we have), we would have little trouble reaching any of our financial goals. What exactly does it mean to tithe? The practice of tithing 10% comes from the Old Testament and was quite common for God's people. Abraham tithed in praise for God's deliverance when he met with the high priest, the King of Salem. Jacob promised to give God a tenth of what he had if God would only protect him and give him what he needed to survive. In the books of the law, the Israelites were commanded to tithe a tenth of their produce as a sign of loyalty and obedience to God. The Prophet Malachi told the Jews that God would bless them if they tithed and would curse them if they did not. Tithing to charity is still a common practice amongst Jewish believers today.

The same kind of generosity carried over into the New Testament since the first Christians were also Jews. The New Testament however does not command that we tithe as a matter of law. Instead, free will offering is emphasized. However, some believe Jesus suggested that tithing was pleasing to God because he told the scribes and Pharisees, show justice to the poor as well as giving your tithes. Both justice and giving were important. Jesus also put a new spin on giving when he commends the humble widow who put her little coin in the offering container simply because it was everything that she had. People were very generous in the early church as some enthusiastic Christians sold everything that they had and dedicated the money to the body of believers, especially to the ministry serving the poor. The New Testament also proclaims that God loves a cheerful giver. Giving is a matter of the heart.

How does this all translate to our time? The church has a long history of giving. We give to mission, to the ongoing work of ministry and to things that enhance our mission and outreach as a congregation. As we give people an opportunity to make a pledge to the building fund we want people to know that every gift counts no matter how small (or even how large for that matter.) Our gifts come from the heart as a result of our thankfulness for what God has done for us. Giving is not a command but a totally voluntary act and is reflective of our relationship with God. Giving does bring blessings. The more generous our hearts, the more connected we become to God's endless grace. I believe that overall God has been very good to me. Therefore, I give.

Our session wants to remind us how important it is not to take what we normally give to the church and give it to the building fund instead. That could only hurt the ongoing mission of the church. Rather, the building fund is a one-time opportunity to thank God for the way we have been blessed and participate in this exciting new mission. It is a way of saying, I want to be a part of this new direction and I want to build on the future for our congregation. Of course the gift doesn't have to be given all at once though the gifts given now will help us begin this project sooner. Gifts can also be given in monthly or yearly increments over a three year period. We also realize that some believe they are already giving as much as they are able to the church right now. If this is the case, then they should continue what they are normally giving and not make a pledge. Our goal may seem impossible to reach for some, yet for others it will be a challenge that God is longing to help us meet. Some people may be saying, "the economy is not good right now and things are not as good for me financially as they have been in the past". Others will also add to that comment, "but overall God has been very good to me, so I want to give." Together we will all pray that God will lead us to do what is right and good and that God will reveal to us what is his will for the future.

I am reminded that the first temple built to God by King Solomon was built during a time of great wealth, but the second temple built after the captives returned from Babylon was built during a time of economic struggle. There is no one way God can work. Continue to pray that we see what God wants to do right here and right now.

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Love and peace,

Pastor Steve

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