

INTRODUCTION

Nobody likes failure. You gave all you had, but you did not accomplish the goal. The L.A. Dodgers baseball team knew it well. They lost to the Boston Red Sox two Sundays ago. The Dodgers got into the World Series the year before too. The Houston Astros beat them and took the championship. Two years and consecutive defeats. How would you feel if you were one of the players? Frustration, sadness and perhaps even anger. There may also be a ton of what-ifs. What if I did that, I might have helped my team win. What if I paid more attention and did not drop the ball, perhaps the score could be different. But none of that can change the final outcome. However, any athlete knows that there is always a next game and a new season. It is painful to accept a loss, but a mature player will embrace the result with positive mentality. He will examine what went wrong so that he can avoid repeating the same mistakes. Everyday is a learning experience. As Christians, we always have a new tomorrow because our Lord is the God of second chance. In the Old Testament, the Israelites stumbled many times before they finally reached the Promised Land. They betrayed God and worshipped a golden calf. God forgave His people. Moses went up Mount Saini again to renew the covenant. Two new stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written were made. Now God wanted His people to move on to the next step. The idol worship incident is actually sandwiched between two lengthy sections that contain the instructions for making the tabernacle and the garments for the priests. Why was God so tedious? The first unit covers the blueprint for making the items. After the idolatry event, God gave the Israelites a second chance. In the latter section they eagerly executed the plan and completed all the work. They turned back from their disobedience and followed God's instructions in every single detail. God's people can succeed when they see the common goal and work together toward it. The same principle applies to every church. We may sin as individuals and commit mistake as a corporate body. But God always gives us a second chance. We can flourish if we turn back, follow God's guidance and get back to the right track.

EXPLANATION

1. 甘心的奉獻 Joyful Contribution

First, the Israelites presented their joyful contribution for the materials to build the tabernacle and the priests' garments. Moses' call for resources is in **35:5** – “From what you have, take an offering for the Lord. Everyone who is willing is to bring to the Lord an offering of gold, silver and bronze.” Besides precious metals, Moses also asked for contribution of yarns, animal skin, wood, spices and gemstones in the next few verses. Where did the people get all those things? Remember Moses told them to ask their Egyptian neighbors for gold and silver articles and clothing the night they left Egypt? Also, some of the items were perhaps their personal belongings or merchandise they bought from traders along the journey. God did not mandate the Israelites to give a proportion of what they had. Moses emphasized that people should give willingly. This word “willing” is repeated four times in the chapter. It appears in **verse 21** when it describes the response of God's people: And everyone who was willing and whose heart moved him came and brought an offering to the Lord for the work on the Tent of Meeting, for all

its service, and for the sacred garments. The people gave joyfully because they knew that their donations were being used to make the elements for worshipping God. This principle of willingness is also applicable to money offering in the church. Paul said in [2 Corinthians 9:7](#) that: Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. A person who contributes joyfully pleases the Lord. The amount given is not important. Remember there was a widow in the gospel who donated two small coins to the temple? Jesus praised that lady for her sacrificially giving in [Luke 21:3-4](#): 3 “I tell you the truth,” he said, “this poor widow has put in more than all the others. 4 All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.” Jesus did not only pay attention to how much she gave, but also how much she had left for herself. People who contribute joyfully does not matter how others look at them either. Days before Jesus went to the cross when He was invited for a meal, Mary poured some very expensive ointment on His head. The disciples were mad at her. [Matthew 26:8-9](#) read: 8 ...“Why this waste?” they asked. 9 “This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor.” The disciples considered such an act of love a waste of money. However, Jesus complimented Mary for her sacrificial giving. She did not mind that people might not appreciate what she did. She just wanted to give the best she could to the Lord. God deserves our very best. Most Chinese tend to be frugal. I am not saying that we should spend a lot of money to build a church like a medieval cathedral with stained glass and a fifty-foot ceiling. We need to strike a balance between being a wise steward of the financial resources God blesses us with and giving God our best. We could have copied from Costco when we built this church. It is practical but it may not look nice. Coworkers spent money wisely with all the décors to make this sanctuary a solemn and comfortable place for us to worship God. Getting back to the Exodus passage. The people responded eagerly to Moses’ request. Let us look at [36:6-7](#) – 6 Then Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp: “No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary.” And so the people were restrained from bringing more, 7 because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work. Moses had to literally stop people from giving because there was more than enough collection. Wasn’t that amazing? The Finance Committee of any church will be envious of that. I once heard a pastor sharing the building plan of his church. The congregation had been borrowing the facilities from an American church. God blessed the church with substantial growth in attendance. The coworker board felt that it was time to have their own church building. A fund-raising event was organized. The congregation went to a park for a picnic. Many people showed up and they were having a good fellowship. Unfortunately, the weather did not cooperate. Even before the pastor was about to deliver his message to motivate people to give toward the building plan a storm swept through. People hurried to pack their belonging and headed home. The pastor and the coworkers were devastated. But the following Sunday people poured in their generous offering. The pastor did not understand. Afterward, different people gave him the same comment: “Now we truly understand that we need our own building. We don’t want to be like homeless people getting soaked in the rain!” You will be willing to give when you see God use the money for His purpose. For example, spacious facilities for church meetings, more people being saved and ability to support overseas mission. The hearts of Israelites were moved to give. They were delighted to see that the materials they gave became part of the future worship accessories. What moves your heart to give? Do not give out of compassion or pity. Our Lord has everything. He is not a beggar. Give out of your love to Him, and because you are grateful for what He has given you first. Give because you want to see how God invests the money for eternity. Someone said it

right: the gospel is free, but the plumbing is not. For sure we need money to operate this church. We need to pay utilities. And yes, your pastor needs to eat just like you. Some of you smart people may wonder why this sermon is scheduled right after the pastoral interview last weekend. There is no conspiracy behind it. But isn't God's timing the best? Supporting another pastor's family needs money. I am not doing a fund-raising today. I am using God's Word to help you think Biblically. If you see this church as your home church, then you should share the expenses. Of course, there are always other people who are willing to contribute more. But if you do not give your portion you will not experience the joy of helping build this church.

2. 同心的建造 Faithful Construction

God's people can succeed when they see the common goal and work together toward it. The Israelites joyfully contributed materials to God. Next, they used the resources collected to faithfully construct the items. In **35:10** Moses called for skillful workers: "All who are skilled among you are to come and make everything the Lord has commanded." Then Moses listed everything that had to be built. I summarize them on the screen. There was the tent (v. 11) which would be the future tabernacle, the ark of the covenant (v. 12), a table (v. 13), where the bread of the Presence would be put, lampstand (v. 14), altar of incense (v. 15), altar of offering and washing basin (v. 16), curtains of the courtyard (v. 17) and garments for the priests (v. 19). Besides the hardware there were also some goods that would be consumed regularly in their worship. There was the bread of the Presence (v. 13), oil for the lamp and for anointing (v. 14-15) and fragrant incense (v. 15). Can you imagine how much labor it would need for the whole project? Let me use the fabric as an illustration. Exodus chapters 25 and 26 give us the measurements of the cloth needed. For the tabernacle, it needed about 2,500 square feet for the sides and 3,000 square feet for the top. Then the courtyard required 84,000 square feet of fabric. Altogether it would need 89,500 square feet. Assuming your home is 1,500 square feet in size. That would be equivalent to 60 times the area of your house! And how did the Israelites get all the cloth? Look at **verse 25**: 25 Every skilled woman spun with her hands and brought what she had spun-blue, purple or scarlet yarn or fine linen. They made the cloth from yarn similar to how your mom or grandma weaves a wool sweater for you. It was a lot of work! Besides, there was the crafting of metals and wood. Other than the labors, there had to be someone who could convert the verbal blueprints from Moses to the finished products. They were the foremen who directed the construction. Two persons were mentioned in the passage. Read **verses 30-32** – 30 ...“See, the Lord has chosen Bezalel... 31 and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts – 32 to make artistic designs for work...” Bezalel was capable to think, design and build all the items. He was the first person in the Bible who was said to be filled with the Spirit of God. Nowadays, some charismatic churches tell us that a person filled with the Holy Spirit will laugh or cry unceasingly, speak in a language that no one can understand or do other strange things. But here Bezalel was filled with the Spirit of God to do God's work. Notice also that Bezalel was not only a craftsman, he was also a designer. It is one thing to make something functional, but it is quite another thing to make something artistically beautiful. The brother who helped us buy and sell our previous home told us that when he first started working as a relator he thought there are only two paint colors – white and beige. Later he worked with a painter who suggested other wall colors. The brother was fascinated by the effects that mango yellow, dark red and pastel green completely changed the mood of a room. What the Israelites built was the infrastructure for their future worship. The

appearance of the tabernacle and the clothes for the priests should be magnificent to reflect God's glory. Besides Bezalel, another foreman is named in [35:34-35](#) tell us: 34 And he has given both him and Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, the ability to teach others. 35 He has filled them with skill to do all kinds of work... Here, it points out another important aspect in the project. God gave those two men the wisdom to equip others to do the job. An experienced workman may not be necessarily be a good teacher. Why were the Israelites so eager to participate in the construction? There is a repeated expression in the passage. It says that in [36:2](#) that everyone whose heart was moved came to do the work. Also, in [35:26](#) every woman whose heart was moved came to spin yarn. The same thing is said in [35:21](#) that everyone whose heart was moved contributed materials for the construction. What moves your heart today when you come into this church? If you think that you are just a worshipper or even a spectator then perhaps nothing will move you. What moves our hearts should be more than obligation. I clean the bathroom because I am assigned the duty today. It should be God's love that moves you to serve. God saved me and put me in this church. This is my spiritual home. I love God, I love God's people and I love God's house. That is why I serve, whether or not I have a title or an assignment. The same Spirit of God who filled the two Israelites also gives believers special talents called spiritual gifts to serve in the church. Paul said in [1 Corinthians 12:4-6](#) that: 4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. We also read this passage last Sunday. The word "service" in verse 5 can be understood as ministry, while the word "working" in verse 6 means task. It is the Holy Spirit who by His own will freely give gifts to different believers so that by working together they can serve various functions in a church. Some roles are more evident like the brothers and sisters serving on the podium. But no duty is dispensable and unimportant. Some ministry tasks may require special talents or spiritual gifts from God. We have some brothers and sisters who are excellent Bible teachers. There are also people who are can organize an event, who have patience to teach little kids or who are handy to fix things. No one person can do it all. Does it need special training to wash dishes, move tables and chairs or vacuum the floor? All it takes is a willing heart to serve. I do not think any leader would tell you that: sorry, we have enough people already. The more, the better! And yes, it takes humility to do simple jobs. I know that some of you are supervisors at work or little kings and queens at home. But in God's house we are all equal. We need people whose hearts are moved by God to build up this church. Are you one of them?

CONCLUSION

God's people can succeed when they see the common goal and work together toward it. From the building project of the Israelites we learn that in a faith community there has to be people who joyfully contribute and there has to be people who faithfully construct. The Israelites undertook a huge project that required the directions from foremen and labors to follow through the instructions. The results? Everything was completed the way God wanted. The same expression of "as the Lord commanded Moses" was used 18 times in chapter 39 and 40 alone! The same order was passed on from God to Moses to the foremen and to the workers. Just forty days ago the Israelites were worshipping an idol. Now they put in their effort together to produce something elegant to worship God. You see, when God's people unite with one heart and actively participate in ministries, the effect is something beautiful that will glorify God.