

Four Pillars for Congregational Giving

Numbers 7

November 13, 2011

The scripture from Psalms 24:1 is often read that says “the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.” It intends to communicate that everything including our lives belong to God. Most of us will say we agree with that, but our humanness also tends to want to rebel and try and haggle with God for control. There was a comedy starring Burt Reynolds back in the 80’ entitled The End. Reynolds played the role of a man who keeps threatening to commit suicide but deep down he was insincere about his wish to die. Near the end of the story he decided to swim so far out into a lake he would drown because he would not have the strength to swim back to shore. Once far out into the lake, he becomes desperate to live again, and begins to swim back toward shore and as he does he negotiates his fate with God. Take a look.

There is at least a little of Burt in all of us. It is the reason why the Bible has many stories and instructions that teach us to surrender to God and express that surrender in generosity. Today we look one of those stories from the Old Testament, the Book of Numbers.

Numbers 7:1-5

As Moses began to lead a new nation of God’s people, **we find in this chapter what could be identified as the four pillars for congregational giving.** Pillars are used to support great weights and structures. As a church we need to know the key pillars from scripture that support the ministry of our church.

1st Pillar: There are biblical expectations for shared giving. Vs. 2, 10-11

Notice once God’s people are organized and on their mission as one people, then they are given instructions and practices for there

to be collective giving amongst the all the people. Verse 2 states **“The leaders of Israel, the heads of their ancestral houses, the leaders of tribes, who were over those who were enrolled made offerings.” v.2**

You don't see this collective giving so much when you read the stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Their offerings are offered individually for the most part. But now when there is a people that has come together with a shared identity, a shared purpose, shared set of belief in God, God instructed them to bring their offerings together for a common cause.

There can be differing opinions at times on how to go about financial discipleship.

There can be differing views about how much to emphasize tithing or giving a tenth of our income.

There can be differing strategies about how congregations should go about their giving, and whether to ask people to make a pledge as we have these past three years or let it always be strictly personal.

But the one thing that cannot be denied biblically is the believers are to bring their resources together. Other books of the Old Testament such as Deuteronomy 26:12 and Malachi 3:8 call for the people to bring their tithes and offering together. In the gospel of John, 13:29 we read among Jesus and his disciples there was kept a common purse. Acts 2:44-45 describes the first Christians bringing their resources together for sharing. The “Lone Ranger” mentality about giving is unscriptural. **The first pillar of congregational giving is that God expects his faithful people to bring their offerings together for his will to be done through them.**

2nd. Pillar: There are biblical expectations to use the generosity for ministry. Vs.4-5

God also instructed Moses to accept the offerings of wagons and oxen for the priest because the Lord said, **“Accept these from them, that they may be used in doing the service of the tent of**

meeting....” v.5 God was saying accept these gifts so leaders had what they needed for their work. They needed the wagons and oxen to transport the essentials that allowed the people to come before the Lord at the Tent of Meeting and worship God together. The offerings that were brought forward had a strategic and particular purpose.

This story is a great reminder and teaching that our giving is for ministry, for action, for transformation, for the money to always follow mission. Money is never the mission or the issue itself. The gift given is never the issue itself, whether the gift is a building, stain glass windows, furniture or flat screens. We give so our church has the means to serve God by serving others.

Illustration: This past summer the new sound system and flat screens were installed in the fellowship hall. And now were beginning to use that to minister to our youth and we see some new youth coming on Wednesdays. A week ago Friday we showed a Christian based movie and just about the entire core group of junior kids showed up for the movie and popcorn. At least one way the money raised for fellowship hall sound system and flat screens is being used for our mission to build some relationships with kids whom most haven't been raised in this church. We have along way to go. We want to see those kids come to worship. We want to see those kids make a profession of faith about Jesus Christ. We want to see them baptized in his name. But shared resources of the church are giving us what we need to do our ministry.

Not only for Consecration Sunday but anything we do in our giving needs to flow from obedience so that God's ministry can be accomplished. **Giving for the sake of doing ministry is the second pillar in congregational giving.**

3rd Pillar: Everyone was included in a chance to give. V.84

The story out of numbers tells us that each leader brought a gift representing their tribe. You read on in this seventh chapter and you find that there was one leader to represent each of the twelve tribes and bring offerings for the worship ministry that the priest would were expected to carry out. In this case everybody gave the same amount. No one was expected to give more than the other. Maybe one reason for this expectation was so no one would be able to be seen as superior or inferior over others. **But the greater principle is the instruction from God made it possible for everyone to have a part in giving. Everyone was included.** When people give together, we become bound together. (Interpreter's Commentary, p.176)

I have heard stories in the past of certain churches that would send out letters to their church members and have a predetermined amount of what they expected people in their church to give and most of the time those letters were not well received. I have to wonder if they tried that idea based on this story since God speaking through Moses instructed each tribe to bring the same offering? I don't take away that understanding from this story. I take away a principle that instructs the church to have a way possible so our invitation for people to give is inclusive; and not excluding. Because there is also scripture from other parts of the Bible like 2 Corinthians 9:7 that calls for people to give as **“each has made up their mind not reluctantly or under compulsion for God loves a cheerful giver.”**

This is why our use of Consecration Sunday uses the stair step plan or guide because it allows everyone to be included and works out their giving as they are guided by the Lord. **The third pillar of giving is include everyone.**

4th Pillar: The giving was celebrative response to God's actions and presence. Vs. 1-3, 88-89

The giving that we read about in verses 1-3 follows on the heels of God blessing the people. Then there are the gifts brought forward. The chapter ends with verses 88-89. The giving concluded and once again God comes to speak further with Moses as God continues to lead the people. This portion of the story teaches giving is part of the way we interact with God. Giving is on our going response to God's activity among us.

Sometimes the reason we may find ourselves dry spiritually is because we are not giving. We may not be giving God much time. We may not be offering God much of our talent. We may not give God much of our resources be they financially or maybe it is as simple as opening up our homes to be used for a hanging out with others or a bible study. Resources is not all about the money thing; its about giving and interacting with God. When there is no giving, don't expect an awesome powerful relationship with God and the church. The truth is some may not give much in any manner to God and they are okay that they haven't much in the way of interaction with God.

The fourth pillar of giving is that our giving is our response to God's action or activity in our lives because we were made in his image.

I heard about a group of guys this week that illustrate this final point. They make 95 cents an hour and they are taking some of their money and supporting missionaries in the Congo. They also run their own church. Their church started with 6 men, they are prisoners in San Quentin state prison. They are criminals who have become Christians. Many are going to be there for a long time. But God is moving in their lives and they are supporting missionaries from behind steel bars, concrete walls and barbwire.. Their giving is out response and activity of God in their lives in a place none of us could ever imagine. How much more should we be able to give out of a sense of what God can do through our

church?