

Gladness and generosity

Bible Readings

OT

Exodus 35:1-10(19);
40:34-38

Epistle

Hebrews 12:18-29

Gospel

Luke 21:1-6

This session creates opportunities for people of all ages to:

- affirm and celebrate God's presence with us and in us
- be challenged to see all our possessions and abilities as belonging to God
- consider the resources and abilities we have to offer
- serve one another and share resources in appropriate ways.

Main idea

In this final passage we find the Israelites bringing both their possessions and talents freely and abundantly to build a special Tent of Meeting. This was a place where God would dwell with and meet his people. Their giving is so generous that Moses has to tell the people to stop bringing their gifts because there is already enough! How many churches would like to have this problem. For us, the focus of God's presence is not a tent but in and among his people, the body of Christ. We are challenged to share generously of all that God has given us with each other, the poor and marginalised and on our shared purpose of serving God in the world.

In this final service a positive link should be made to the Giving in Grace literature, the brochure, letter and response forms. They may be distributed at this service, perhaps a week earlier. In some churches they will be posted out. For more general information on this see the [Communications page](#) of the Giving in Grace website. For more on response forms specifically see the [Response Forms](#) web page. Just as the Israelites brought their gifts joyfully and generously so church members are invited to review and renew their own commitment to providing the resources for the ministry and mission of the local church. As the Tent of Meeting declared the presence of God with his people, so our church, the buildings, the activities and above all the people declare the presence of God in our local communities. This cannot be done without adequate resources provided by the planned and considered giving of God's people.

Background

In Exodus 33:1-3 God tells the people of Israel that because of the golden calf incident the people will inherit the land but God himself will not go with them. The response of the people is to repent and the symbol of that repentance is to remove their ornaments, the jewellery brought out of Egypt. In chapter 35 the people then bring their gifts to build the tabernacle or tent of meeting. This was a portable structure that was the focus for God's presence with his people in the desert.

It is important to avoid the immediate application of this narrative to giving money for our church buildings and the activities that go on there. Our giving to God is so much richer and wider than this. We need to take a New Testament perspective. God is present in us by his Holy Spirit. So the application moves from a most holy place to a most holy people. Rather than seeing our financial contributions as our 'giving back to God', perhaps we should think of them instead in terms of sharing what we have with each other to achieve our common purposes as his people – serving God, caring for each other, living for God in the world. Our use of money is just one aspect of our complete giving of our possessions, our abilities and ourselves to God. The activities use Romans 12; Ephesians 2:19-23; 4:1-16 to emphasise this New Testament point of view.

This part of the Exodus story challenges us to acknowledge that God is present with us in every part of our lives. It encourages us to respond as wholeheartedly as the Israelites, with all we have and all we are – including our contributions through the collection plate

and standing order. The material includes suggestions for looking back over the previous four weeks of 'Giving in Grace', with a choice of activities to help the congregation consider their own responses to all they have done, seen and heard.

Warming Up. Warming Down

This weeks activities include activities using Romans 12; Ephesians 2:19-23; 4:1-16 to emphasise a New Testament perspective on the living temple rather than a physical place of worship, important though that is.

- God is With Us and Souvenirs: two activities reflecting on the presence of God in our daily lives
- Richie Rich: a 10 minute video snippet and discussion on true riches
- Something to Offer: a sketch on the building of the Tent of Meeting
- God in Every Place: a reflective activity leading into prayer