

Launch: Get Ready Study #1



MAIN POINT

Receiving God's blessing is intimately linked to giving.

INTRODUCTION

What is a dream that you have for the future? How long have you had this dream?

What are you doing to ensure that this dream becomes a reality?

Dreams are often ideals or hopes that we have for the future. Dreams are helpful because they allow us to keep going. They can be a focal point or a goal during a tough season of life that helps us push through. Unfortunately, they can always be put off until later. Dreams will never become a reality unless we marry our hopes with actions. For many people, living generously is a dream somewhere in the future, but in order to get ready to live a generous life, we need to take action today.

UNDERSTANDING

1. IN ORDER TO RECEIVE YOU FIRST HAVE TO LEARN TO GIVE.

Read Proverbs 11:24-25. To what did Solomon compare the benefits of living generously? By contrast, what happens to the stingy person according to this proverb?

In your experience, what benefits have you received from living generously? What link exists between generosity and quality of life?

The Bible teaches that our lives are enriched as we give to others. However, the Bible is not alone in this assertion. *The Paradox of Generosity* was a national study of nearly 2,000 Americans in 2010 commissioned by the University of Notre Dame. The authors studied behaviors like philanthropy, volunteering, tithing, donating blood, and helping other people. From an extensive questionnaire, interviews, and field observations, they found out what the Bible teaches: the more generous a person is, the happier and more fulfilled that person is.

Most people recognize the potential benefits that come from generosity on some level, yet not all people are generous. What are some common traps that keep us from being generous?

What stops you from being generous? Why are these traps ultimately excuses, and how can we overcome them?

The problem with being generous is that we have an enemy who doesn't want that for us. Satan is a thief and a liar, and he has set traps for us that keep us from giving. All these traps seem logical at first, but if you look below the surface they're really just excuses. First is the delay trap, the idea that we will be generous in the future (solution: start today). Then there's the "dinero trap" that would have you believe that you can't be generous because you can't afford it (solution: generosity is a state in our hearts). Next, the distracted trap tells us that we are simply too busy to be generous (solution: you can give where you are). Lastly, the disappointed trap makes us afraid to give because of a time in the past when we got burned (solution: you can't control how generosity is received). All of these traps are meant to rob you of the joy of generosity. Choose not to fall for them.

One way to break the traps is to give some amount this week. Where will you give?

How might having a generosity app or being able to text a gift allow you more freedom to be generous?

2. THE GIVING LIFE CAN BLESS AN ENTIRE CITY.

Read Proverbs 11:10-11. What tangible effect can a generous church have upon our city?

What are a few societal ills that can be treated (in part) by our generosity?

Anyone can be generous at any time. This extends far beyond our wallets. Read Proverbs 11:1,7,9,18, and 26. How else can we be generous? Where are we called to be generous?

Read Proverbs 11:29. Why are our homes often the place where it is hardest for us to be generous?

If the research study mentioned previously is true, then being generous makes a difference. When a group of people come together to be generous, the total effect can change an entire city. God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things all the time—just consider the Book of Acts. People were coming to the church in droves partially because of their evident generosity toward one another (2:44-45; 4:34). You can be generous with your word, work, hearts, and actions in your community and in your home. As generosity begins to spread, an entire city can be blessed.

3. THE GIVING LIFE REFLECTS A GIVING JESUS

Read Proverbs 11:30. Where else in Scripture do we see a tree of life? What does this tree represent?

Read Mark 10:45. How is Jesus the perfect example of a generous life?

Why is being generous dependent upon receiving grace from Jesus?

The tree of life is found in both Genesis and Revelation. It was God's gift of an eternal, prosperous relationship with Him. A tree keeps bearing fruit. It is hard wired for prosperity, bounty, and surplus. In Revelation, this tree appears again. It is stated as providing the healing of nations. It is a powerful, life-giving tree. The Garden of Eden Tree of Life and the Revelation Tree of Life are bridged by the generous, life-giving sacrifice of Jesus Christ on a tree, the cross. He is the perfect example of self-sacrificing generosity. Through His example, we learn what it means to give of ourselves to others.

APPLICATION

Where will you be generous this week?

Who in your family or in this group could benefit from your sincere generosity? What is one tangible thing you can do this week?

How can we point others to Jesus through our generosity?

Download the Generosity by LifeWay giving app and store the text to give number in your phone. Make a spontaneous gift this week.

PRAY

Praise God for being generous to us in Christ. Ask that He would help us extend the generosity He has given to us toward others. As we begin to live generously, pray that our church and our city will be blessed by the generosity of Jesus working itself out in our lives.

MEMORIZE

"A generous person will be enriched, and the one who gives a drink of water will receive water."
-Proverbs 11:25

COMMENTARY

PROVERBS 11

11:2. Pride makes a person an obstinate fool or mocker (1:22) who will be disgraced (13:18). Wisdom comes from the fear of the Lord (9:10), which comes from faith and presupposes humility—giving up pride and self-sufficiency.

11:3. Integrity implies genuineness and reliability. Perversity implies subversion and deceit, treachery (see 2:20-22) and destructiveness.

11:5. To clear a path is literally to make it straight, to improve it so it is easy to walk on. A blameless person will not grow weary or fall on such a path and so will reach his destination.

11:7. This verse implies that when a righteous person dies, his hope does not vanish. The book of Proverbs supports this implication of eternal rewards, including verses 6 and 8 here.

11:9. Though the ungodly spread slander, the righteous are rescued through their own knowledge and that of their acquaintances. Those who know them realize the slander is untrue.

11:13. A gossip spreads slander (Lv 19:16; Jer 6:28; 9:4; Ezek 22:9).

11:16. This proverb teaches that there is something more important than riches (cp. v. 28; 22:1). It is also significant that one gracious woman might obtain a greater reward than many violent men.

11:17. The kind man is one who acts with faithful love (19:22). He looks out for others. Conversely, the cruel man is merciless and unfaithful, having no concern for others.

11:18. The empty wage is insubstantial, deceptive—its appearance differs from reality. The true reward is dependable. There is a Hebrew pun in this verse. The word for “empty” is sheqer and the word for “reward” is seker.

11:20. This proverb has connections to 10:9; 19:1; and 28:6. The word blameless here is related to the word “integrity” in those three verses above (see note at 2:7); twisted here is related to “perverts” in 10:9, “deceitful” in 19:1, and “distorted” in 28:6 (see “crooked” in note at 2:15); and conduct is related to “his ways” in 10:9 and “right and wrong” in 28:6. So a poor man with integrity (19:1; 28:6), and whose conduct is blameless, is well off because the Lord delights in him. Conversely, the person with a twisted mind or deceitful lips (19:1), who perverts his ways (10:9) and distorts right and wrong (28:6), is at a great disadvantage, even if he is rich, because he will be found out (10:9) and is detestable to the Lord. If he persists, he’s a fool (19:1).

11:21. Be assured is literally “hand to hand.” It may mean that it is as sure as a contract solemnized by a handshake (6:1). On not go unpunished, see note at 6:27-29. Righteousness is so powerful that even the next generation of the righteous is likely to escape eternal death due to the influence a parent’s righteousness has on their offspring (Ex 20:6; cp. Ezek 18).

11:22. The pig was an unclean animal; no amount of adornment could make up for this fundamental defect.

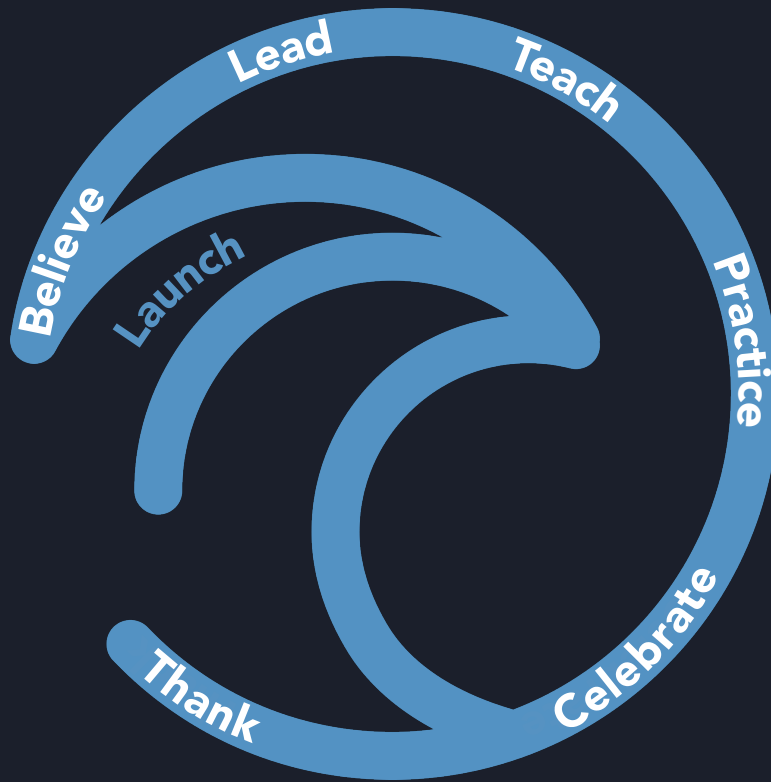
11:23. The righteous... desire to do good to others, and this turns out well for them. The wicked intend wrath for others, but their only hope for the future is wrath upon themselves.

11:24. To give freely is literally to “scatter”—to be generous without worrying about where the blessings fall.

11:26. The king of Moab refused to sell grain to the traveling Israelites and came under God’s curse (Dt 2:26-31), while Joseph sold grain during a famine and was blessed (Gen 41:56; 47:13-20).

11:29. To inherit the wind is to end up with nothing.

11:30. The second part of this verse is difficult. The Hebrew reads literally “the one taking lives is wise.” Elsewhere in the Bible the phrase “to take a life” is always negative (1:19; 1Sam 24:11; 1Ki 19:10,14; Ps 31:13; Ezek 33:6); it never means “to win a soul.” But it doesn’t fit with the rest of Scripture to say that the person who kills people is wise, so there must be another explanation.



Launch: Get Ready Study #2



MAIN POINT

God desires for us to be generous with the gifts He has given us.

INTRODUCTION

Would you consider yourself rich? Why or why not?

When you think of a rich person, what comes to mind?

If you are reading this study, chances are, you're rich. The idea of being rich usually makes us think about celebrities or famous athletes with an impeccable wardrobe and all the pleasures that life affords. However, compared to the rest of the world, most Americans are indeed wealthy. If you have a smartphone, you are rich. Have more clothes than you could possible wear? Rich. Have so much food that it actually goes bad and you have to throw it away? Yep, you're rich. We have all been blessed by God, and that blessing comes with some expectations.

UNDERSTANDING

1. GOD WOULD LIKE TO GIVE YOU MANY GOOD GIFTS.

Read 1 Timothy 6:17-19. How does it make you feel to know that God is addressing you when He speaks to the “rich in the present age”? Where did this ability to produce wealth come from (see Deuteronomy 8:17-18)?

While being rich might make us feel guilty, why did Paul say God gave us all the blessings we have?

Read Ephesians 6:7-8 and 1:3. What other blessings has God extended to followers of Jesus that exceed the physical blessings of this world?

Riches come from God. Being rich in this present age is not bad or good in and of itself. God has given us the ability to produce wealth, and He has given us wealth to enjoy. Riches are not evil unless they steal our hearts away from God. The gifts and blessings that God has given to us are meant to be just that—gifts for us to enjoy, be grateful for, and use to His glory.

2. GOD WOULD LIKE YOU TO BE GRATEFUL.

Gratefulness has to be cultivated. It doesn't come to us naturally. We know this to be true every time we complain about our work or something trivial. Remember that God wants us to enjoy the things that He's given us. That can happen when we follow this process: 1) Start your day right. God has called us to be thankful continually (1 Thess. 5:16-18). 2) Check yourself throughout the day. Remember complaining is a choice (Phil 2:14). 3) Pray before, during, and after your day. There's never a bad time to pray (Phil 4:6).

Of the steps above, which do you need to put into practice regularly?

If we are so blessed, why is being grateful so hard for us?

3. GOD WOULD LIKE YOU TO BE GENEROUS.

Look back at 1 Timothy 6:18. What would God wish for us to do with the blessings He has given us?

Who could you bless with your generosity this week? If you are hoarding all of your wealth for yourself, what grace of God are you missing out on?

How does giving to God demonstrate that we have faith in God?

Why should we not be discouraged when we fail at being generous?

The church functions on the generosity of God's people (tithing and other gifts). Without generosity, the church would not succeed at her mission. This is why Paul commended the rich to give generously. God has blessed the American church to be a blessing to others. Taken to a smaller level, He has blessed you to bless others. When you give back to Him, it is a statement of faith because it demonstrates that you believe God can provide for you and your family out of what's left over. Generosity is a statement of trust in God. Yet, we know that we won't always succeed because we are fallen men and women. God sees the heart, though, and is there to help us succeed. He is more concerned with your generosity than you are.

4. GOD WOULD LIKE YOU TO SEE YOUR BEST FUTURE IS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF GENEROSITY.

How should we use our money if we hope to "lay up treasure . . . for the coming age" (1 Tim. 6:18-19)?

How does focusing on the life that is to come help us live with greater urgency and generosity today?

God alone is in charge of our finances, and we never know exactly what or why things happen. But, when they do we can take comfort and trust in the God who is all good, all powerful, all giving, and all loving. You can't control money, but God controls everything. The best way to secure your best future is by following God's plan and wisdom. He controls the future. He can do stuff you can never do and may not even know to dream about doing. Giving to others is an investment in the future that God is preparing for you.

APPLICATION

As you have prayed and asked God to direct your generosity, where has He led you to consider giving? What steps have you taken to make this a reality?

How can we encourage one another to be grateful? How might actively sharing how God is blessing us foster gratitude among us?

Will you commit to doing a few generous acts before our next meeting? Come back next time and share the results.

Go online to the church website or utilize the Generosity by LifeWay app. Set up a recurring gift to make generosity more consistent or practice gratitude by giving a noncash gift.

PRAY

Thank God for blessing us with gifts that we can and should enjoy. Pray that we would use the gifts that He has given us to love and enjoy Him more. Pray that we learn to be generous and grow in our ability and desire to give to God and others.

MEMORIZE

"Instruct those who are rich in the present age not to be arrogant or to set their hope on the uncertainty of wealth, but on God, who richly provides us with all things to enjoy."—1 Timothy 6:17

COMMENTARY

1 TIMOTHY 6:17-19

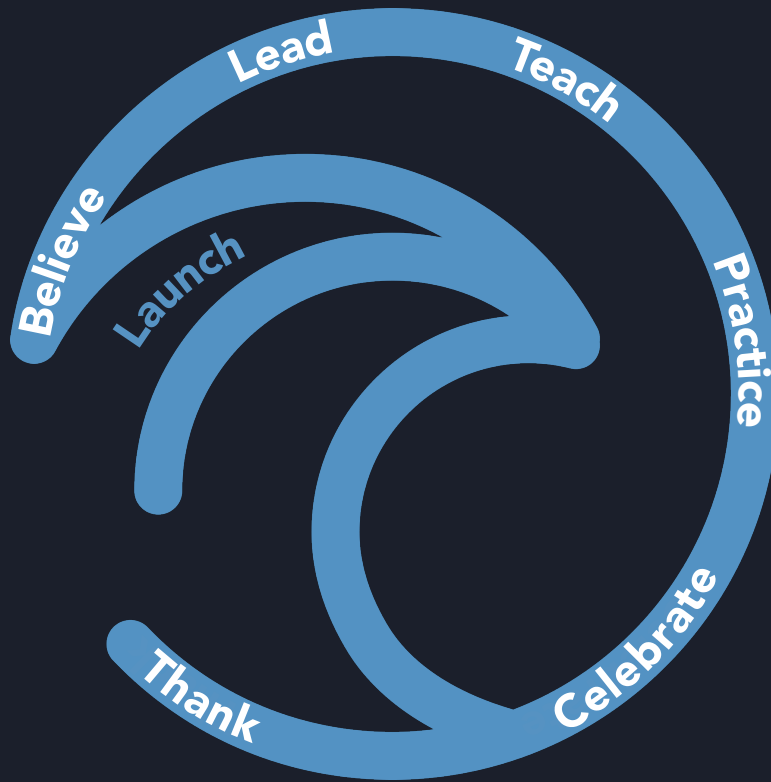
Paul turned from a series of admonitions to Timothy to give advice to those already rich. The preceding words on wealth in vv. 6-10 were spoken to those who aspired to wealth. As a final thought Paul spoke a word to those who already had it. The constructive advice here balances the more extreme prohibitions of

the earlier passage. He did not condemn wealth, but he showed the added temptations the wealthy face. He was vitally concerned that Christians have the right attitude toward their wealth and make the proper use of it (see also Luke 12:13-21; Ps 52:7).

6:17. Paul's beginning reference to the present world suggests that the wealthy can have their wealth only in this age. It is good for this present world, but it does not convert automatically into blessedness in the world beyond. In this verse Paul contrasted right and wrong responses to the possession of wealth. A wrong response involves an arrogant attitude and the making of wealth as the hope of one's life. As a deterrent to trusting in riches, Paul mentioned the transitory, uncertain nature of wealth. The word uncertain contains a reminder that it is by no means clear that riches will continue with the one who has them. The right response is to hope in a God who lavishes on His people all their needs. The statement implies that God does not give wealth to promote pride but that we might use and enjoy it in His will (see also Jas 2:5; 4:13-14; 5:2-3). Paul's sound advice walks the straight line between a world-denying asceticism and a self-centered indulgence. The advice promotes gratitude toward God for the benefits He bestows.

6:18. Paul mentioned four ways to use wealth wisely. To do good involves using wealth in a positive way instead of letting it feed a life of personal luxury. To be rich in good deeds pointed the wealthy in the direction in which they were to be truly rich, in the doing of good deeds. These two verbs probably include more than benevolence. The need for benevolence is emphasized in the next pair of terms. To be generous demands a liberal sharing of wealth with others. One who is willing to share shows that the generous act of giving is to spring from internal generosity. Paul was suggesting that genuine wealth is found in what we give, not what we have.

6:19. Paul outlined the outcome of such generosity by stressing two truths. First, he stressed that giving generously to the needy stores for the giver a future treasure. Paul was not advocating that the giver could earn salvation or favors from God. Good works are solid evidence of salvation and assure us that we have eternal life. Paul may have based these thoughts on such words as contained in Matt 6:19-21. The godless, on the other hand, lay up treasures for themselves of a different kind (Jas 5:1-5). Second, Paul stressed that generous actions allow the giver to lay hold of eternal life in the here and now. Paul had urged Timothy to lay hold of this in v. 12. Here Paul expressed that taking hold of eternal life is a goal of the unselfish giving he had commanded. Christians who enter the life of love by unselfish behavior will enter gloriously into God's presence in the life to come.



Launch: Get Ready Study #3



MAIN POINT

God's vision is fulfilled by the faithful generosity of His people.

INTRODUCTION

When you were younger, what dreams did you have for the life you would lead in the future?

What did those dreams call you to give up or sacrifice to make them a reality? Did they ever become a reality? Explain.

Dreams are a better version of the future. They are a reality that is hoped for but not yet seen. Dreams allow us to see beyond what is in front of us and envision a better future. That is what God is leading us to do as a church: to get ready and dream, to follow His vision and trust Him for the results. Getting ready for generosity means getting ready to dream.

UNDERSTANDING

> GOD HAS A VISION FOR YOUR LIFE.

Being generous is not always easy. Read Exodus 25:2. Where were the people of Israel when they received these directions? What would have made this request from God hard for them?

Read Exodus 25:8-9 and 25:22. What promises of God accompanied what He was asking them to do? How was God's vision for them greater than the difficulty of the moment?

Why is it significant that their new future with God began with an act of significant generosity? How is being willing to go along with what God asks of us a mark of faithfulness?

When Moses gave these words to Israel, they had not been out of Egypt for very long. God was asking them to give out of the spoils they received from Egypt to contribute to His sanctuary. At this time, they didn't have a means to recoup what they were giving away. What was being asked of them was an enormous step of faith. God was asking them to give toward a place where He would dwell with them and a future that was better than what they could see right now. When we are getting ready to be generous, God is asking the same thing from us. He is asking us to trust that He has a vision for our lives.

How does knowing that God is with you allow you to see a future that is far beyond what you deserve?

> GOD HAS A VISION FOR OUR CHURCH.

Read Exodus 35:20-29. As the community came together to give, what was the focus of this offering—the gifts or the people giving? What can we learn about generosity from this example?

Believing the gospel makes it possible for us to be who we are and bring what we have. How does this relieve the burden of giving and help us pursue the vision God has given us?

The offerings given in Exodus are very specific. Each person was free to bring what God laid on their hearts. Notice the heart, not the gift, is the focus of this passage. Knowing God intimately through faith allows us to be who we are and give what we have. He is not asking us to pretend to be someone else or to give beyond our means, He is asking us to be authentic and faithful. Generosity isn't a far off goal we only dream about, but a lived reality in the present.

Read Ephesians 4:11-13. Giving is not just about material resources but our giftedness as well. How is your giftedness an essential resource of the church? Why is it important to see our gifts this way?

Read Ephesians 3:20-21. How does giving call us to trust on God to work and to will for us? Why is it good to have a vision that only God can accomplish?

Giving is always about God. Giving helps to accomplish the vision that God has laid before us. It is not about our human plans, but the divinely inspired ones that allow us to coordinate our efforts with God Himself. By faith in the vision He has given us, we are able to give of our resources and give of ourselves to see Him accomplish more than we could ever task, think, or imagine. Vision for our church begins with God and works through our generosity.

> GOD WANTS TO MOVE US TOWARD BIGGER THINGS.

How is God moving in your heart as we have talked about His vision for His church?

Where can you commit to using your gifts for His glory, His resources, and the time He has given you?

What great thing are you dreaming that God will do through this church?

Spend the closing moments of group listening to people's dreams and praying for God to use you, empowered by His Spirit to bring them about in the world.

APPLICATION

What is your first step to participate in the vision God has given our church?

How can we work together as a small group to accomplish the vision of our church? What does this process look like at the level of a small group?

What will we miss if we don't pursue the vision that God has laid before us?

Spend some time discovering God's unique gifting, experiences, and passions placed within you. How can these be put into generous service for His vision for your life and church?

PRAY

Praise God for the vision He has given to our church. Pray that we would carry it out with faithfulness and integrity. Ask that He would move in the hearts of our congregation to bring about generous gifts of resources, time, and talent all toward the goal of seeing His mission and His will accomplished in our community and in the world.

MEMORIZE

"Tell the Israelites to take an offering for Me. You are to take My offering from everyone who is willing to give." – Exodus 25:2

COMMENTARY

EXODUS 25:2,8-9,22

25:2. This offering would be the result of internal compulsion and not external—as with taxes or public pressure. The willingness of the people extended so far that the workmen had more than enough materials (36:3-7).

25:8. For the Israelites to make a sanctuary for the Lord to dwell in continues the theme of His presence with His people and His goal in bringing them out of Egypt—to make Himself known as their God, and to give them a unique identity as His people (6:6-7; 19:4-6; 29:43-46). The word translated "dwell" is rendered "settled" in the statement that "the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai" in 24:16. It is closely associated with the word "shekinah," used in postbiblical discussions of the Lord's presence. It is also connected by sound and concept with the Greek verb in Jn 1:14 that is translated "took up residence." By commissioning the building of the tabernacle, a portable worship center, the Lord showed that He intended to live among the Israelites more closely than when meeting with them on Mount Sinai.

Returning to the suzerain-vassal comparison, the suzerain would customarily live far from the vassal, using his collected tribute exclusively for his own enjoyment. The best a vassal nation could hope for was that their suzerain would provide security and predictable levies of tribute rather than sporadic, devastating raids. The Lord, however, was talking to Moses about residing among the Israelites as His own people.

25:9. Attempts to imagine or to build a replica of the tabernacle and its furnishings can only proceed with the disadvantage of not having seen what the Lord showed Moses, in addition to difficulties posed by rare words describing unfamiliar items. The tabernacle itself and a complete description of all its details were not what subsequent generations needed.

25:10-22. The ark, a rectangular wooden box covered inside and out with gold, sat in the most sacred area in the tabernacle. It symbolized the Lord's presence with the Israelites in at least three ways: (1) It was a repository for the stone tablets given to Moses, which were a witness, or testimony to the requirements the Israelites had agreed to. (2) On the annual Day of Atonement, the high priest sprinkled blood on the mercy seat, the ark's cover, in keeping with the Lord's provision for dealing with the sins of the people (Lv 16:13-15,29-34). (3) The ark was also where the Lord met with Moses and spoke with him (Num 7:89). This was in keeping with His earlier assurance of His presence with Moses (Ex 3:11-12; 4:11-15).

EXODUS 35:20-29

This section describes the preparation of materials and workers needed to build the tabernacle. The people who brought the prized and costly materials contributed them willingly (35:5,21-22,29; 36:2-3,5). They also worked willingly (35:26; 36:2), using God-given skills in design, execution, and teaching (35:30-36:2). They had both the will and the skills needed for the work that the Lord had commanded (35:4,10,28; 36:1,4; cp. Eph 2:8-10).

At the start of Exodus the Israelites were oppressed slaves forced to make mud bricks and build cities to suit Pharaoh. He considered the Israelites to be seditious and lazy, so he refused to supply enough straw for their work. Now the Israelites could willingly participate in building a structure for the glory of God for which He had provided the necessary materials and even skills for the workers.