

DEVOTIONAL 12

A large, vibrant flame rises from a golden, textured base against a dark, stormy sky. The flame is bright orange and yellow, with a blue base. The sky is dark blue and grey with white clouds. The golden base is a textured, rectangular block.

GOD IN OUR MIDST

EXODUS 35:1-9, 20-29 36:2-7; 39:32, 42-43

^{35:1} Moses assembled all the congregation of the people of Israel and said to them, "These are the things that the LORD has commanded you to do. ² Six days work shall be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. ³ You shall kindle no fire in all your dwelling places on the Sabbath day."

⁴ Moses said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, "This is the thing that the LORD has commanded. ⁵ Take from among you a contribution to the LORD. Whoever is of a generous heart, let him bring the LORD's contribution: gold, silver, and bronze; ⁶ blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen; goats' hair, ⁷ tanned rams' skins, and goatskins; acacia wood, ⁸ oil for the light, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, ⁹ and onyx stones and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece.

²⁰ Then all the congregation of the people of Israel departed from the presence of Moses. ²¹ And they came, everyone whose heart stirred him, and everyone whose spirit moved him, and brought the LORD's contribution to be used for the tent of meeting, and for all its service, and for the holy garments. ²² So they came, both men and women. All who were of a willing heart brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and armlets, all sorts of gold objects, every man dedicating an offering of gold to the LORD. ²³ And every one who possessed blue or purple or scarlet yarns or fine linen or goats' hair or tanned rams' skins or goatskins brought them. ²⁴ Everyone who could make a contribution of silver or bronze brought it as the LORD's contribution. And every one who possessed acacia wood of any use in the work brought it. ²⁵ And every skillful woman spun with her hands, and they all brought what they had spun in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine

twined linen. ²⁶ All the women whose hearts stirred them to use their skill spun the goats' hair. ²⁷ And the leaders brought onyx stones and stones to be set, for the ephod and for the breastpiece, ²⁸ and spices and oil for the light, and for the anointing oil, and for the fragrant incense. ²⁹ All the men and women, the people of Israel, whose heart moved them to bring anything for the work that the LORD had commanded by Moses to be done brought it as a freewill offering to the LORD.

Exodus 36:2-7

² And Moses called Bezalel and Oholiab and every craftsman in whose mind the LORD had put skill, everyone whose heart stirred him up to come to do the work. ³ And they received from Moses all the contribution that the people of Israel had brought for doing the work on the sanctuary. They still kept bringing him freewill offerings every morning, ⁴ so that all the craftsmen who were doing every sort of task on the sanctuary came, each from the task that he was doing, ⁵ and said to Moses, "The people bring much more than enough for doing the work that the LORD has commanded us to do." ⁶ So Moses gave command, and word was proclaimed throughout the camp, "Let no man or woman do anything more for the contribution for the sanctuary." So the people were restrained from bringing, ⁷ for the material they had was sufficient to do all the work, and more.

Exodus 39:32, 42-43

³² Thus all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting was finished, and the people of Israel did according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses; so they did.

⁴² According to all that the LORD had commanded Moses, so the people of Israel had done all the work. ⁴³ And Moses saw all the work, and behold, they had done it; as the LORD had commanded, so had they done it. Then Moses blessed them.

DAY 1

EXODUS 35:1, 39:32, 42, 43

¹ Moses assembled all the congregation of the people of Israel and said to them, “These are the things that the LORD has commanded you to do.”

³² Thus all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting was finished, and the people of Israel did according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses; so they did. ... ⁴² According to all that the LORD had commanded Moses, so the people of Israel had done all the work. ⁴³ And Moses saw all the work, and behold, they had done it; as the LORD had commanded, so had they done it. Then Moses blessed them.

We often chafe at being told what to do. In the back of our minds, we feel like we should have options, so we may respond by saying, “No, I don’t want to do that” or “I don’t want to do that now” or “I’d rather do it a different way.” We often want to do things on our own terms. But God’s commandments don’t work that way; they are to be accepted and obeyed on his terms, not ours.

Following or obeying what God has communicated to us through his Word begins with a recognition of who is in charge. That is also the beginning point of discipleship—becoming more and more like Christ as we follow him. To be a disciple, we must listen to God with attentive ears and receptive hearts. When we do that, we see that what he desires for us is for our own good. We don’t know what is best for us but God does. His commandments are commandments of love, just as a parent out of love would tell a child to stay away from a fireplace or a hot stove.

The commandments God gave to the people of Israel through Moses clarify how the relationship with God the Father works. All of the commands concerning the building of the tabernacle point to a God who wants to dwell with his people, keeping and sustaining them with his very presence.

Today, God communicates with us through his Word and the Holy Spirit. The Word of God shows us who God is, who we are, and how the world works. There is no detail about the world or about us that God does not understand. Doesn’t it make sense to pay attention to the one who created the world and still sustains it?

God's commandments take into account the destructiveness of sin. Sin poisons relationships, corrupts motives, and impedes our ability to be disciples. The commandments give us clear guidelines and boundaries to help us understand those dynamics and a discipleship path to follow. They help to create a healthy functioning society. We all want peace and prosperity. The Bible helps us to understand how our actions affect other people.

God wants more for us than we can imagine. He's given us his Word so we will know how to live in relationship with him and others. Discipleship isn't trudging along reluctantly and blindly in the dark. It is following the Master to the streams of living water and green pastures in the glorious light of His presence and grace.

PRAYER

Lord, help us to see all that discipleship is and where it leads. Help us to be disciples who are eager to obey your commands and follow your lead.

DAY 2

EXODUS 35:1-3

¹ Moses assembled all the congregation of the people of Israel and said to them, “These are the things that the LORD has commanded you to do. ² Six days work shall be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. ³ You shall kindle no fire in all your dwelling places on the Sabbath day.”

God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and loving, is starting over again. He has received Moses’ intercession for his stubborn, rebellious people, and is reinstating the covenant they had broken. Moses brought new tablets of stone where the commandments were written; God would dwell with them in the tabernacle they would construct. The people have been humbled and are eager to show their gratitude by contributing to this work. But before they begin, Moses reminds them of who they are by reminding them of the Sabbath. Even a holy work like building the tabernacle did not alter the command to keep the Sabbath.

What was God saying? Wouldn’t it be better to finish the tabernacle as soon as possible so that God’s presence could be at the center of their community?

When Moses received the commandments the first time, God’s final instructions were about the Sabbath— “Above all, you should keep my Sabbaths.” Above all! He told Moses the Sabbath was a sign of two things. First, it was a sign of their covenant relationship. God had chosen them out of all the nations to be his treasured possession. It was an everlasting covenant where God promised to protect and provide for them and teach them his ways. The seventh day was holy, a day set apart to be together celebrating the gift of their freedom. Second, it was a sign of rest. The very first Sabbath was the seventh day of creation when God rested because his work was complete. Everything was good, exactly as he wanted it to be. God blessed this day and delighted in the world he had created.

We are all familiar with the ways God’s beautiful gift of Sabbath was both neglected and distorted to a legalism that was a burden instead of a delight. But Jesus reclaimed and redeemed this precious gift. He said the Sabbath was for man, not man for the Sabbath, and he proclaimed himself Lord of the Sabbath. When his salvation work was finished, he rose, Lord of all, and invited us into his rest. Each week as we gather to worship, we remember again who we are and who we belong to. We remember God’s promises to protect us and provide for us in our own wilderness experiences. We remember together how we are to live, that his ways are good.

And we sing and celebrate our freedom in Christ! Slaves of men and slaves of sin never rest. Our Sabbath is Resurrection Day, the first day of our week, time set apart to rest in what God has done and to look forward to our promised eternal rest.

PRAYER

Lord of all, we thank you today for giving us a day when we have permission to set aside other things to be together remembering, celebrating and resting in the finished work of our Savior. We are so busy and often so weary. Jesus, we want to learn what it means to rest in you. Amen

DAY 3

EXODUS 35:4-9, 20-29; 36:2-7

⁴ Moses said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, “This is the thing that the LORD has commanded. ⁵ Take from among you a contribution to the LORD. Whoever is of a generous heart, let him bring the LORD’s contribution: gold, silver, and bronze; ⁶ blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen; goats’ hair, ⁷ tanned rams’ skins, and goatskins; acacia wood, ⁸ oil for the light, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, ⁹ and onyx stones and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece.

²⁰ Then all the congregation of the people of Israel departed from the presence of Moses. ²¹ And they came, everyone whose heart stirred him, and everyone whose spirit moved him, and brought the LORD’s contribution to be used for the tent of meeting, and for all its service, and for the holy garments. ²² So they came, both men and women. All who were of a willing heart brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and armlets, all sorts of gold objects, every man dedicating an offering of gold to the LORD. ²³ And every one who possessed blue or purple or scarlet yarns or fine linen or goats’ hair or tanned rams’ skins or goatskins brought them. ²⁴ Everyone who could make a contribution of silver or bronze brought it as the LORD’s contribution. And every one who possessed acacia wood of any use in the work brought it. ²⁵ And every skillful woman spun with her hands, and they all brought what they had spun in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. ²⁶ All the women whose hearts stirred them to use their skill spun the goats’ hair. ²⁷ And the leaders brought onyx stones and stones to be set, for the ephod and for the breastpiece, ²⁸ and spices and oil for the light, and for the anointing oil, and for the fragrant incense. ²⁹ All the men and women, the people of Israel, whose heart moved them to bring anything for the work that the LORD had commanded by Moses to be done brought it as a free-will offering to the LORD.

Exodus 36:2-7

² And Moses called Bezalel and Oholiab and every craftsman in whose mind the LORD had put skill, everyone whose heart stirred him up to come to do the work. ³ And they received from Moses all the contribution that the people of Israel had brought for doing the work on the sanctuary. They still kept bringing him freewill offerings every morning, ⁴ so that all the craftsmen who were doing every sort of task on the sanctuary came, each from the task that he was doing, ⁵ and said to Moses, “The people bring much more than enough for doing the work that the LORD has commanded us to do.” ⁶ So Moses gave command, and word was proclaimed throughout the camp, “Let no man or woman do anything more for the contribution for the sanctuary.” So the people were restrained from bringing, ⁷ for the material they had was sufficient to do all the work, and more.

Read what Aristides of Athens, a second-century Christian Greek author, wrote to the Emperor Caesar Hadrian to counter the popular notion that Christians were nothing but a sect of erring troublemakers:

And he, who has, gives to him who has not, without boasting. And when they see a stranger, they take him into their homes and rejoice over him as a very brother; for they do not call them brethren after the flesh, but brethren after the spirit and in God. And whenever one of their poor passes from the world, each one of them according to his ability gives heed to him and carefully sees to his burial. And if they hear that one of their number is imprisoned or afflicted on account of the name of their Messiah, all of them anxiously minister to his necessity, and if it is possible to redeem him they set him free. And if there is among them any that is poor and needy, and if they have no spare food, they fast two or three days in order to supply to the needy their lack of food.

Generosity marks the heart of the people of God. This is true today. It was true in the second century. And it was true all the way back to the time of the Exodus. I am not sure, but our passage today may mark the only time when the leaders of God's people had to step in and stop the people from giving! What is going on here?

Reading this passage, one cannot help but be struck by the notion of generous, stirred, and willing hearts. God's abundant mercy (cf. Exodus 34 esp. vv. 6,7) has overwhelmed them and transformed their hearts, replacing the eagerness with which they had previously made their offering to false gods (cf. Ex. 32:1-6). This is the very embodiment of what Paul describes as a cheerful giver, one who gives willingly and not under compulsion (2 Cor. 9:7). This giver is not compelled because they are motivated by earning favor from God, but, like the Israelites, they are motivated by the favor they have received from God.

Also of note in this passage is that generosity does not simply characterize a few individuals but the whole community! Everyone came, men and women, presumably children as well. They brought gold and silver, wood and fine linen. They brought their skills, their energy, and their time. Nothing was held back and all were delighted to participate. What a picture this is for the church today. Often we fixate on amounts of money and lament what little we may be able to do. We forget that God doesn't need our money, but he invites us to joyfully participate together in building his kingdom. All gifts, all people; all welcomed and celebrated.

Finally, note how radical generosity, motivated by the grace of God, will make a people stand out. We can't help but notice it when we read this text. The Israelites *had to be restrained from bringing their gifts*. What a testimony! Surely the surrounding nations heard of this generosity. It was as counter-cultural then as it is today. In the second century, Aristides, a spy for the Emperor Hadrian, was convinced of the genuineness of Christianity in part because he saw their generosity. Often we wring our collective hands agonizing over how we can help a hurting world see the good news that marks the story of Jesus. Perhaps the answer is embedded in an OT story that speaks to us of NT realities. There may be no better apologetic than generous hearts.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. 2 Corinthians 8:9

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. 2 Corinthians 9:6-8

PRAYER

Gracious and generous Father, thank you for giving us the greatest gift of all, your Son. Help us to have a cheerful and generous heart that gives to others out of gratitude for what you've given us.

DAY 4

EXODUS 35:1, 20-29

¹ Moses assembled all the congregation of the people of Israel and said to them, “These are the things that the LORD has commanded you to do.

²⁰ Then all the congregation of the people of Israel departed from the presence of Moses. ²¹ And they came, everyone whose heart stirred him, and everyone whose spirit moved him, and brought the LORD’s contribution to be used for the tent of meeting, and for all its service, and for the holy garments. ²² So they came, both men and women. All who were of a willing heart brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and armlets, all sorts of gold objects, every man dedicating an offering of gold to the LORD. ²³ And every one who possessed blue or purple or scarlet yarns or fine linen or goats’ hair or tanned rams’ skins or goatskins brought them. ²⁴ Everyone who could make a contribution of silver or bronze brought it as the LORD’s contribution. And every one who possessed acacia wood of any use in the work brought it. ²⁵ And every skillful woman spun with her hands, and they all brought what they had spun in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. ²⁶ All the women whose hearts stirred them to use their skill spun the goats’ hair. ²⁷ And the leaders brought onyx stones and stones to be set, for the ephod and for the breastpiece, ²⁸ and spices and oil for the light, and for the anointing oil, and for the fragrant incense. ²⁹ All the men and women, the people of Israel, whose heart moved them to bring anything for the work that the LORD had commanded by Moses to be done brought it as a freewill offering to the LORD.

Following Israel’s sin with the golden calf, Israel recommitted themselves to their covenant with God. In response to this recommitment, Israel gives generously in response to the command for them to give materials and offer their skills toward the construction of the tabernacle. The scene is beautiful in that the whole community comes together to build the place where God would dwell in their midst. Read through the passage again and notice how many times the author points this out: the words *all*, *everyone*, and *both* are used over and over again.

I think the community sees real discipleship going on here as people are living out the commands of Moses. Those who have had their hearts stirred and are giving generously provide a powerful example to the rest of the people. Their actions will inspire the whole community to give and to serve in the building of the sanctuary. The more people who contribute using the gifts that they have been given, the greater the work that is done and the better the community functions.

We can see this same pattern in Acts as the early church works together to build a new sort of sanctuary.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. Acts 2:42-47

Here we see this new community, responding to the grace and good news given by the apostles, using their spiritual and material gifts out of generous hearts. The difference in this case is the sanctuary they are building is not made out of wood, metal, or precious stones but out of the people that are added to their number. People are added not merely because of the apostles' teaching but also because of the example of this radical fellowship that is being formed. Seeing the message of the apostles lived out draws in and provides a model for how that message is lived out.

Some people say we just need to preach the gospel. But not only do we need to preach the gospel, we need to live out the gospel message. Our lives and our church should reflect the call of the gospel. The generous use of our gifts can be an example to others to continue to build God's kingdom.

PRAYER

Truly the Lord is good to his people. We long to dwell with you. Let your Spirit enlarge our hearts. Let us remember the good that you have done. Move our hearts in the fellowship that you have provided. Help us to love our brothers and sisters. Let our community reflect the good news and be a light in the world. Amen.

DAY 5

EXODUS 40:17-33

¹⁷ In the first month in the second year, on the first day of the month, the tabernacle was erected. ¹⁸ Moses erected the tabernacle. He laid its bases, and set up its frames, and put in its poles, and raised up its pillars. ¹⁹ And he spread the tent over the tabernacle and put the covering of the tent over it, as the Lord had commanded Moses. ²⁰ He took the testimony and put it into the ark, and put the poles on the ark and set the mercy seat above on the ark. ²¹ And he brought the ark into the tabernacle and set up the veil of the screen, and screened the ark of the testimony, as the Lord had commanded Moses. ²² He put the table in the tent of meeting, on the north side of the tabernacle, outside the veil, ²³ and arranged the bread on it before the Lord, as the Lord had commanded Moses. ²⁴ He put the lampstand in the tent of meeting, opposite the table on the south side of the tabernacle, ²⁵ and set up the lamps before the Lord, as the Lord had commanded Moses. ²⁶ He put the golden altar in the tent of meeting before the veil, ²⁷ and burned fragrant incense on it, as the Lord had commanded Moses. ²⁸ He put in place the screen for the door of the tabernacle. ²⁹ And he set the altar of burnt offering at the entrance of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting, and offered on it the burnt offering and the grain offering, as the Lord had commanded Moses. ³⁰ He set the basin between the tent of meeting and the altar, and put water in it for washing, ³¹ with which Moses and Aaron and his sons washed their hands and their feet. ³² When they went into the tent of meeting, and when they approached the altar, they washed, as the Lord commanded Moses. ³³ And he erected the court around the tabernacle and the altar, and set up the screen of the gate of the court. So Moses finished the work.

The garden, the tabernacle, the ark, the temple, his people. These are all the places that God dwells in the true story of the Bible. God's presence has always been in the midst of his people, as we are learning in Exodus. Paul says as much in 2 Corinthians 6:16:

What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

This is categorically true. God dwells in the midst of his people, those who follow Jesus. So what does this mean?

If you look at some of the passages in Exodus 40 and 1 Kings 8 after the tabernacle and temple were completed, we see that the Lord dwelt in these places. It was in these places that the glory of the Lord shone through.

“And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.” (1 Kings 8:10-11)

The glory of the Lord filled each space where he dwelt—the garden, the tabernacle, the ark, the temple, and his people. We, as followers of Jesus, are walking temples that are inhabited by God and his glory, which shines through. So what might the implications be for us today? There are many, but let’s consider three:

1. The tabernacle and temple were the places that God’s people would go to meet him. Today, the Spirit dwells within each believer and the Church, the bride of Christ. And he dwells in the midst of believers who meet together as God’s collective people: *‘Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am with them.’* (Matthew 18:20).
2. God’s glory is pleased to shine through where he dwells. Since God dwells in his people, his glory is made known and shines through them. *“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”* (2 Corinthians 4:6)
3. We are walking sign posts for God. As a seminary professor of mine used to say, “We are little mirrors, representing and imaging God everywhere we go.” This is true because God dwells in us. Our lives point to God.

PRAYER

Almighty Father, thank you that you are so pleased to dwell with and in your people, from the time of the garden to the heavenly city. May the glory of Jesus shine through to reveal to the watching world the beauty, truth, mercy, and faithfulness of the Lord. Amen