

able to give as generously as this

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[0 : 0 0] King David is an old man. The passage that we've read is at the very end of his reign, at the very end of his life, he is an old man. But he's not a grumpy old man. He's an excited old man. He's excited by the goodness of God and the generosity of God's people. And that is captured in these striking words in his prayer that we find in verse 14. But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you and we have given you only what comes from your hand. David and the people have been giving generously for a building project. They rose to and met the challenge. And you don't need to be a genius to work out where I'm going with this. We are faced as a congregation with a challenge that is big and exciting, a root and branch refurbishment of this building that will make it fit for purpose, for worship and mission for us today, for our children, and if the Lord carries our children's children and perhaps even beyond. We need to rise to the challenge by giving generously, something in the order of half a million pounds. Rob's given more of the details so that we can reach the total required. We need to give generously just like the Israelites did for the building of the temple. But what does that mean? What does it mean to give generously? I'm sure nobody here would have any objection to the principle, the concept of giving generously. We'd all say, oh, that's a good thing.

But what does it mean? What does it look like to give generously? I want to ask a couple of questions that revolve around that factor, that detail. The first question is, what is giving generously?

But then also, and perhaps even more importantly, why did the people give generously? And really it's that second question that occupies more of the passage before us. But it's those two questions that I want to pose and try and answer. But even before we pose and try and answer those questions, the question could be asked is, if this passage that we've read, is this passage that speaks of a king, King David, and of a people, the Israelites, 3,000 years ago, is this passage really applicable to us today? Or is it not just a convenient passage to be cynically employed to try and extract as some serious cash? Well, I want to briefly demonstrate that it is applicable, and I want to do so by drawing your attention to one seemingly insignificant word in the passage. To see and discover that the passage is applicable, and indeed that it was written with the explicit intention of being applicable. And the word is the word daric in verse 7. Now, it's difficult to imagine a more underwhelming way to begin a sermon by drawing your attention to a word like daric. Like, really, where are we going to go with this? But bear with me as I develop why this word is very, not only intriguing, but very significant. A daric, there in verse 7, let me just read it so you can picture or have an idea of how it's being employed. They gave towards the work of the temple of God 5,000 talents and 10,000 darics of gold. So, this long list of all that was contributed, and within this long list, there's this reference to 10,000 darics of gold. A daric was a coin, okay? That's simple enough. It was a coin.

But it was a coin named after, as the name suggests, a character. It was named after King Darius I of Persia. Okay, fair enough. This is a coin. It's named after a king. You know, that happens. But if you have a handle on ancient history, you will detect a problem. The problem is that this Darius, after whom the coin is named, was born some 400 years after the events recorded by the chronicler.

[5 : 1 3] So, what we're being told here in this passage in the Bible is that the Israelites contributed 10,000 coins commemorating a king who didn't appear on the scene of time for another 400 years.

Yeah, right. Some might say, well, that's typical, isn't it? The Bible, full of contradictions. That obviously didn't happen. They obviously didn't give these coins. These coins didn't even exist when this project was in place and funds were being raised. Well, is this evidence of the Bible's many inconsistencies? The book of Chronicles, from which this passage is found or where we've read

from, was written, we don't know by whom. Usually, it's spoken of simply as written by the chronicler from the title of the book. The reason for that is we don't know for sure. Some suggest it might have been Ezra, but there's a measure of consensus that it was written about 500 years after the events described and written for a particular audience. It was written for the Jews who had returned from exile in Babylon and were in Jerusalem, that Jewish community in Jerusalem following the return from exile. And this was a community that faced many challenges, not least among them, significantly, the small matter of rebuilding the temple, the very temple that was built with all of these fabulous resources that we've read of. Some of you will remember the prophet Haggai, how he exhorts the people, challenges the people, you who are living in your paneled houses while the temple is in ruins.

Well, these are the people for whom the book of Chronicles was written. Now, when we appreciate that, we can understand why the author, the chronicler, uses language, in this case, even a currency that the people will be familiar with. What he's doing is he's saying, well, I need to be understood, good. And so I'm going to use the language that people understand. And so he uses this currency.

It's a bit like if you had been on holiday at some point and you were trying to explain how much the tour cost, and I don't know where you were, and you were in Bulgaria, or you were somewhere where you know that the people wouldn't recognize the currency, and you would convert it into pounds so people could understand. That's really what the guy is doing here. He wants the people to understand what he is saying. You see, this isn't just history to be read and to be intrigued by. This is the remembrance of past success employed to serve as a present challenge. The author is saying to the original audience, listen, guys, God and God's people have done amazing things in the past.

Look how they gathered and gave all the materials for the temple. You can do the same. You there in Jerusalem, a small community, a relatively poor community, you can do what the people of God did in another generation. And so this passage, this account of the generosity of God's people in David's day served as a legitimate challenge to God's people 500 years later in the time of the chronicler, and it serves that same purpose 3,000 years later for us today here in Bon Accord. Now, of course, I readily concede that the parallels between the time of David and our time, the challenge that David faced and that we faced, are not exact. There's the small matter of scale. Solomon's temple, let's call it Solomon's temple. He was the one who then built it with these materials. Solomon's temple has been valued in today's money, and it's a very difficult thing to do, but as a result, there's a wide range of values that have been calculated, but anything from 3 billion pounds to 50 billion pounds.

[9 : 35] It's all about the gold. That's really, everything else is small change. It's the gold that gives it this spectacular price tag. Just to get a handle on that, the upper end of that scale is replacing Trident, Hinkley Point, the new Fourth Road Bridge, and just for a little local interest, we can throw in the Aberdeen bypass, just a small change.

All of that together gives you some idea of the scale of Solomon's temple. Our wee project is a modest 1.6 million of which we hold about two-thirds.

But leaving aside the question of scale, the bottom line is that this passage is intended to serve as a challenge to God's people in every age to give generously. It is applicable. And this then brings us to our two big questions. What is giving generously? And why did the people give generously? First of all, then, what is giving generously? Verse 14, David states this, that the people gave generously. That's his take. That's his conclusion from what he saw going on round about him. But what is that? And I'm talking here about definition with some degree of precision.

What constitutes generous giving? Are we left to the subjective sense or take of every individual? You know, for me, a certain amount, I would say, well, that's pretty generous.

[11 : 07] Somebody else might say, well, that's not that generous, and have a different perspective. Is that what we're left with? Just whatever everybody imagines or thinks. Well, let me suggest one necessary feature of generous giving. There may be more, but I want to focus on one necessary feature. Generous giving is giving over and above the norm.

Now, you might say, well, that's okay, but does that take us much forward? Because then the question emerges, well, what's the norm? If generous giving is above the norm, okay, but what's the norm?

Well, let's go back to the people in the passage that we've read. What would have been considered the norm for the people in David's day? What would David have considered to be the norm for the people he is commending as generous givers?

Well, the norm for them would have been the time. The God-ordained practice of giving one-tenth of your harvest or income back to God. Now, time doesn't allow us to speak at length on this matter, but just a brief overview.

The tithe, this practice of giving one-tenth, it's something that predates the Mosaic law. It's in the law of Moses, but it predates that. Jacob speaks of giving a tenth of what he'd received back to God.

[12 : 31] And then, of course, it did become mandatory within the civil legislation of Israel. And again, we're not going to turn to the passages that explain all that for reasons of time.

But it was established at that time by God that this is what God required of his people. Well, that's fine, but then the question could legitimately ask, but what about today?

We live in different times. We're not subject to the civil legislation of Israel. Well, what do we find in the New Testament? Well, we find in the New Testament that Jesus, while not giving great importance to the tithe in the grand scheme of things, nonetheless recognized its continued volume. You know, when he's criticizing the religious leaders for tithing, even their herbs, he's saying, you know, there are more important things than that.

But then he says, you should do the more important things without leaving undone. These less important things, like the tithe. So, at the very least, you can acknowledge that Jesus recognized the value of it.

[13 : 41] It's also true that in the New Testament, the principle of proportional giving is restated. The tithe operates on that basis. It's a proportion of your income.

So, as you have prospered, so in proportion to that, you give. That principle is very much retained and restated in the New Testament.

If we can just notice one occasion when we see that in 1 Corinthians chapter 16, and at the beginning of that chapter. 1 Corinthians 16 at the beginning.

Now, about the collection for God's people, do what I told the Galatian churches to do on the first day of every week. Each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income. Leaving aside the details of this particular collection, what we're interested in is the principle in keeping with your income. That principle is retained. And then, on numerous occasions, God's people in the New Testament are encouraged to excel in the grace of giving.

[14 : 49] And that language of Paul, as he writes to the Corinthians, but the same theme is found on repeated occasions. So, just to recap or to refocus, we're trying to answer the question, what is generous giving?

And we're proposing that one necessary feature of generous giving is that it is giving over and above the norm. The norm for the Israelites was the tithe.

And the norm for us, as a non-mandatory model and starting point, can also be the tithe. The giving of a tenth of our income to the Lord's work through the local church that we are part of.

So, the question for us is, do we do that? Do we tithe? And I'm not going to leave that hanging as a tame rhetorical question.

I'm going to try and answer the question for us here at Bon Accord. Now, just to be clear, I don't know what anyone here gives. I don't want to know.

[15 : 54] I have no interest in knowing what anybody gives. And I don't know. The only person that I know how much they give is me. Because I've got to write the check or whatever it is I do.

I don't know. Let that be very clear. But I do know, because it's information in the public domain, I do know how many people give. We've already been told about 50 regular contributors.

Regular being those who give on a monthly recordable basis. I also know what the average contribution is of those contributors. It's about 150 pounds.

Well, you can do the maths. 150 pounds a month times 12 months. What does that work out? 1,800 pounds. If that corresponds to a tithe, that would mean that the average income of contributors in Bon Accord is 18,000 pounds.

I don't think so. What do you think the average income of contributors in Bon Accord is? I don't know. You can come up with your... You might imagine it would be.

[17:00] I'd be very surprised if it was less than double that figure. So I think the outcome of our little bit of maths is to conclude that we don't tithe to the local church.

That's not an angry protest. It's simply a statement of fact. That is where we are. If we did tithe to the church, we would be able to meet our current financial obligations, take on the additional monthly obligation of servicing a loan, and have money left over.

That's simply a financial fact. It's not some great discovery. And I say all this to provide some perspective to the challenge that we're facing today. It is eminently doable.

It wouldn't even require, on our definition, generous giving. But let's move on to the bigger and more important question. Why did the people give generously?

As we look at the passage before us, let me suggest five reasons the people gave generously, none of which involved any arm twisting or guilt manipulation of any kind.

[18:08] And in identifying the reasons, we will be identifying what was true for King David specifically, but we will draw the reasonable inference that what was true for David was also true for the people.

So five reasons why they gave generously, why they gave over and above the norm. I think the first thing, and the crucial reason, the reason with which we begin, is that the people were captivated by the generosity of God.

If David's prayer reflects what was true of the people, as I think we can reasonably infer that it does, we see that so clearly, captivated by the generosity of God.

Verse 11, yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power. Yours is the glory and the majesty and the splendor. David's prayer of praise is one in which he acknowledges both that God is the sovereign owner of all and that he gives generously to his people.

He owns everything, and of all that he owns, he gives to us. Wealth, verse 12, wealth and honor come from you. You are the ruler of all things.

[19:26] In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. You own everything, and of your abundance you give to us. And that reality of God's greatness, and out of his greatness, his generosity, is maybe captured there in that central verse that we've focused on in verse 14.

Everything comes from you. Everything comes from you. And remember, this is the king speaking. This is a king who has been spectacularly successful as a king.

This is a king who has presided over extending borders and increasing wealth. How many of his subjects, how many of the neighboring kings would have come and spoken this kind of language and directed it to David?

But it is David who acknowledges that everything he has, every daric he could contribute, every talent of gold came from God, and he simply returns some of what he has received to the one who gave it to him.

He was captivated by the greatness of God, by the goodness of God, by the generosity of God. And of course, this is true of all the material blessings we receive from God.

[20:47] They all come from him. But it's also true of our spiritual blessings. God has generously provided for us, and he has done so by displaying a sacrificial generosity that Old Testament saints could hardly have imagined.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

He gave his Son. He gave his only Son. And he gave his Son to a cruel death for you and me. Somehow the word generous falls short.

We need a new word. And no word could do justice to this action on the part of God in our favor. The generosity of the Father, but a generosity also exhibited by the Son.

In 2 Corinthians and in chapter 8, Paul speaks of that generosity in the very context of encouraging the people there to be generous. And there we read concerning Jesus, 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.

[22:06] The generosity of the Father, not surprisingly at all, replicated by, reflected in, the generosity of the Son.

And so the question for us is, if we, as was King David, are we captivated by the peerless and mind-blowing generosity of God?

Or do we still imagine that what we have is thanks to our own merit, to our own efforts, to our own industry?

Are we captivated by the generosity of God? That's the first reason why they gave generously. But the second reason we can identify is that the people were awed by a sense of undeserved privilege. And then we turn again to that verse, verse 14. But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to give as generously as this? You can almost sense the humble bemusement of King David.

[23 : 12] You say, who am I? Who am I that I would even be allowed to contribute to this wonderful endeavor? Remember, this is the man who had been denied the opportunity to build the temple, which is what he would have loved to do.

And God had said, no, you're not going to build it. Your son's going to build it. And yet, does he go off on a huff? Does he say, well, if that's the case, then he can find the money? No, he gives generously and he considers it an enormous privilege to give generously.

David knew all about grace. This verse is the verse of one, or these are the words of one who has grasped grace. Everything I have comes from God.

Everything. There's nothing that I deserve. Nothing that I've earned. All of God. David knew that God didn't need his gold.

The opportunity to give was itself a grace-given privilege. David deserved nothing, but was given everything, even the privilege of giving.

[24 : 24] David and the people were awed by a sense of undeserved privilege. Is that true of us? But the third reason we find here is that the people were anchored in the reality of belonging.

Notice the language that David uses. He's speaking, but he's speaking in representation of the people. He says, but who am I? He begins speaking about himself, but then he, I wouldn't say he corrects himself, but he develops the thought, who am I and who are my people?

That we should be able to give as generously as this. Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. There's this real sense of community of all belonging to this one people of God.

And as those who belong, so those who have a stake, those who have a participation, those who share the privilege of giving. And the people clearly were anchored in that reality of belonging. David was no solitary philanthropist. He belonged to the people of God. And not just David. Every day laborer, every refugee welcomed into the community, every widow, every orphan belonged.

[25 : 37] And because they belonged, they wanted to give. They didn't want to miss out. They didn't want to be those who didn't have a stake, didn't have a participation.

Giving generously was an expression of their belonging and of their identity as the people of God. And they were anchored in the reality of belonging.

We're nearly there. The fourth reason that they gave generously is that they were driven. The people were driven by a commitment to the Lord. For that, we turn not to the verse that we're focusing on, but one other verse.

In verse 5, you have David calling the people to join him in giving. It's very intriguing, the language that he uses. He says there, now, who is willing to consecrate himself today to the Lord?

What he's asking them to do is to give. And yet the language he uses is the language of consecration. And what that reveals to us is that to give is a spiritual activity.

[26 : 39] It is an act of worship. To fail to give is to deny God the worship he is due. Our present circumstances constitute in God's providence a renewed call to consecration.

And the question is, how will we respond to this renewed call to consecration that will be evidenced in our giving to the Lord's cause and work?

But then one final reason, and with this we close, one final reason that would explain why it is that the people gave generously. And let me suggest this, that the people were united by a shared vision.

We began by noticing that David, though an old man, was an excited old man. He was excited about what was being done. He was excited at the prospect of a temple that he wouldn't even build or ever enter.

And yet he was excited by it. I wonder, are we excited by what God will do with the building that we are able to refurbish as it serves as a place of worship for us and for our children, as it serves as a base camp for mission to declare to our neighbors in the city the wonderful news concerning our

Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

[28 : 05] David was excited. The people were excited. And because they were excited, they got on board enthusiastically, not as some dreary duty, not as some burdensome obligation, but as something that they wanted to do, something they were excited to be part of.

Well, let's close by simply reminding ourselves of this striking language that David employs as he contemplates the privilege that has been his.

But who am I? And who are my people that we should be able to give as generously as this? Let's pray.

Lord, Lord, God, to be your children, to participate in your purposes and in the extension of your kingdom. We pray that we would, by the work of your Spirit, respond to that call, that renewed call to consecration, to commitment to commitment to you and grant to us a growing and a genuine thrill and excitement, not only at the material work that could be done in a building, but on the work of the gospel that we can be involved in from today forward into the future.

And all of these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.