

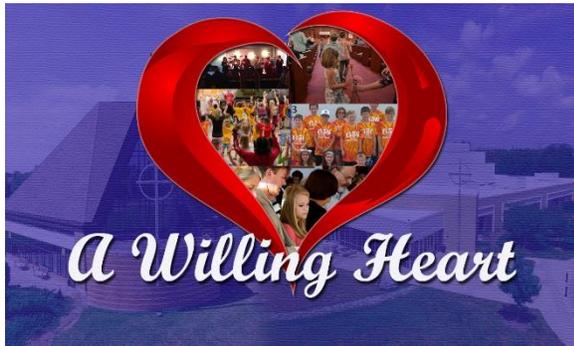
Title: A Willing Heart

Preaching: Randy Spleth, Senior Minister

Scripture: [2 Corinthians 8:1-7](#)

Text: [Exodus 35:4-5, 20-22, 29](#)

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They launched a building fund campaign. It was a terrible time to do so but their leader said, "This is what God wants us to do." Knowing this group of people, you would expect lots of complaints. They were known for griping. When they had meals together, they complained about the food. They thought the serving sizes weren't big

enough. They complained about the water. It had a foul aftertaste. They demanded that their pastor get a water purifier. Given all of this, you'd expect them to make a fuss. It was their nature to be a disagreeable, unhappy lot. Still, he said, "This is what God wants us to do."

Grumpiness wasn't the only obstacle. The timing was awful. Unemployment was off the chart; there was a terrible housing crisis. They weren't too sure about where their pastor was leading them. Some even tried to redirect the mission while the pastor was away, introducing a completely new worship element. When he returned, there was a major confrontation; the pastor lost it with an outrageous display of anger. It is surprising that he didn't get fired or quit. Even with all of this going he remained faithful saying, "This is what God wants us to do."

Ask any fundraising consultant; talk to any reasonable, experienced church leader and they would say, "No. Timing is off; you can't be successful." And yet, the records indicate that it was the most successful building fund campaign in history, and it was the first. It took place 3,500 years ago. It is the first building fund campaign in the Bible. God doesn't wait for the people of Israel to make it to the Promised Land. Barely into a wilderness journey of 40 years, without a home or jobs, a golden calf in their past, God says to Moses, "Take up an offering and build a tabernacle for worship." Let me read it to you.

"Moses said to all the congregation of the Israelites: This is the thing that the Lord has commanded: Take from among you an offering to the Lord; let whoever is of a generous heart bring the Lord's offering: gold, silver, and

bronze; blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine linen; goats' hair."
(Exodus 35-4-6)

Everyone went back to their tents, prayed, looked around at what they had, "And they came, everyone whose heart was stirred, and everyone whose spirit was willing, and brought the Lord's offering to be used for the tent of meeting...brooches and earrings and signet rings and pendants, all sorts of gold objects, everyone bringing an offering of gold to the Lord." (Exodus 35:21a,22b) Not just a few, not half, all.

"All the Israelite men and women whose hearts made them willing 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 35:29)

This is the first building fund drive and something amazing happens. It was so successful that Moses told the people to stop giving for they had enough to do all of the work. Why was it so successful? How did they overcome all the challenges?

Three things. They understood the need and its importance to their lives. They understood who was asking them to give. And together, everyone gave. Everyone had a willing heart. Nothing is impossible with a willing heart.

Thirty-five hundred years later we are in the same situation. We aren't wandering through a wilderness collecting manna every morning for our meals, but we are launching a building fund campaign, One Church Together. Let's look at our campaign alongside of theirs.

They had a clear vision of what they were accomplishing. They understood the need. They were building a tabernacle. The tabernacle could be described as the first unit, a pop-up church that could be set-up and broken down during the 40-year journey. Tabernacle means "tent of meeting" or "place of dwelling" or "sanctuary." It was the sacred place where the Israelites came together to worship and present their offerings. It was their landmark and icon. It kept them grounded and guided them through life. "For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, before the eyes of all the house of Israel at each stage of their journey." (Exodus 40: 38) It was very important to them.

We aren't building a tent of meeting or place of dwelling or a sanctuary because we already have two tents of meeting, our Mud Creek and Promise Road campuses. We are renewing our commitment to existing building projects. In 1997, our congregation built the sanctuary at the Mud Creek

campus. It immediately became an iconic presence in the reservoir community with a beautiful Celtic cross. It doesn't travel with us like a cloud by day or a fire at night. But the cross fires up when the sun is at the right angle and shines brightly at night.

That same cross was used on the second campus to demonstrate that we are one church together. The Promise Road campus is filled with classrooms for children, a place where our youth gather, as well as a place of worship. These two buildings are where we come to yield our lives to God's authority and are inspired to follow Jesus' ways. They form our identity as one church together; they are our landmarks and icons.

We are building, even though no dirt will be pushed, no wall raised, no nail driven. We are building a stronger foundation for tomorrow, building on the previous three years successful campaign, Renew Together. With it, we discovered new resources and put our congregation into a healthier financial position, reducing our debt by over 1.2 million dollars.

The construction projects over the years have been funded with building fund campaigns. Sometimes, we have been very successful; other times, the economy did not encourage strong support. We have never had a time in our church when we told people to stop giving. Moses is probably the only pastor who has ever had that privilege.

In fact, we've never had enough to stop asking, not even close to enough.

With this debt comes responsibility, not just to the bank, but to the future ministries and the future people who will call Geist Christian Church their tent of meeting. To be faithful and responsible stewards of what God has given us and sustain our vision to serve the Geist and Fishers communities, we must understand what we need to accomplish. We need to build by reducing debt again. Our goal is to raise 1 million dollars over the next three years and every dollar raised will be used to reduce principal. Almost every home has a mortgage payment. God's home of Geist Christian Church is no different. Do you have a clear understanding of what the need is?

Then let's talk about who is asking you to give. The Israelites had a clear understanding of who was asking them to give. Do you?

Some of you know that my wife is a professional fundraiser for Kiwanis and additionally teaches at the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. She tells me that one of the biggest challenges in raising funds is not asking. "You've got to ask, Randy." So I'm asking you to make a pledge and give to One Church Together. But I'm not the one doing the asking.

You may be thinking, "Oh, come on, Randy. Everybody here knows who is doing the asking. We know what is going on here. Whenever we have these types of campaigns, people are always looking for an excuse not to give. They salve their conscience by blaming the pastor, blaming the process, blaming the decisions of the past or saying, "I wasn't around when you did all of this so don't ask."

I'm not. I'm no Moses and Moses wasn't asking. God was and is. Do you remember what Moses said, "This is the thing that the Lord has commanded." (Exodus 35:4b) Giving is a spiritual matter, something commanded by God. One of the amazing truths of the first building campaign, a story you may have never heard of is the amount of real estate it takes up in the book of Exodus, sixteen chapters. Sixteen chapters out of 40. It is the same length given to telling the story of the liberation of people from Pharaoh and fleeing Egypt. It is just as important a story as being liberated; maybe more so because it is the climax of the book of Exodus. All the way through those sixteen chapters we heard, "This is the thing that the Lord has commanded."

God is doing the asking. The Israelites understood this, and they were wildly successful. All giving is ultimately an expression of worship and a commitment to the One who blessed you with resources. The church may receive the funds and use the gifts, but God is the one asking. "This is what God wants us to do", to serve our community, make disciples in these tents of meetings, to teach them all the Jesus commanded. Again, the Hebrew people understood God was asking and its why they were so successful.

And they were successful because everyone participated, everyone had a willing heart. That was the third ingredient. "All the Israelite men and women whose hearts made them willing 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 35:29)

It's an amazing story. Eighteen different times over sixteen chapter we hear that everyone participated. Some participated with some big gifts of gold and silver. Others just brought yarn or spices or goat hair. Those who had a lot gave a lot. Those who had a little gave out of the little that they had. How does that happen? It happens when hearts are stirred and spirits are willing. It happens when people open themselves up to what God is doing in their lives in the community and place that they worship.

Let me be honest about what I've learned in my years of being a minister. If your heart isn't in it, you won't respond. That's true of everything, isn't it? If your heart isn't in your marriage, there won't be love. If your heart isn't

in your job, you won't be fulfilled. If you don't have a willing heart to parent, you won't have children or if you do, your children will suffer. And if your heart isn't in your faith, you won't be able to love God and love neighbor, you won't give.

If you have not already received an information packet and pledge card, you will receive one this week. The material states a need and you are asked to respond. You are asked to help strengthen the foundation of our mission, believing that our church has reached many people over the last two decades with our two buildings, and many more can be and will be reached.

I hope and pray that everyone will participate. Some can give a lot; some, only a little. Some might have gold and gems to give; others only yarn or goat hair. But all those gifts together are needed for us to be wildly successful. But, it will only happen if you understand the need and its importance to you if you understand who's asking, and you have a willing heart.

One of the most successful building fund drives in modern times has just taken place. You witnessed it; maybe even participated in it. It was launched at a terrible time because of a terrible thing, a fire. Notre Dame burned on April 15th, the tragic result of an underfunded restoration project. The world watched with horror at the valiant efforts to save the iconic presence.

Previously, there was a need for millions of dollars that people simply didn't want to give. They were terribly underfunded and despite years of building fund campaigns, people weren't giving. They said I'm done with that. I'm over it. Let someone else give. But suddenly they saw that they were in jeopardy of losing their church, the icon that guided their life, a place that has been their spiritual center of Paris. Suddenly, they again understood the need. Over 790 million dollars has been pledged with small donors leading the way in the first gifts received. How can that happen? They understood "This is what God wants us to do", to have this church of the Ile de la Cite. So, they gave with willing hearts and nothing is impossible with a willing heart.

I hope you know that and claim that. Nothing is impossible with a willing heart. If our hearts are willing, we will respond and as One Church Together, we will be successful. Pray with me that you will, that we will.