

'Build My House and I Will Promise to Build Yours'

The presence of God surrounded me so tightly during the worship service that I hardly noticed anything else. I felt the embrace of unconditional love and desired to respond somehow.

I had this overwhelming sense of gratitude. What could I possibly give Him in that moment?

I thought about Mary of Bethany. What moved her heart to give her most precious possession? Something that was worth a year's wages! We don't see a journal of her feelings in the story, but we do see her actions. She found Jesus and lavishly gave Him her extravagant gift.

"While He was in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at supper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of ointment, a very costly spikenard. She broke the jar and poured the ointment on His head" (Mark 14:3, MEV).

I too was having a moment when I felt moved to give Him something of value. It was purely worship, and I had no thought to receive anything from it. I happened to be wearing an expensive 18-carat gold bracelet. It was a gift from my husband's Middle Eastern family, actually imported from Iran, and my most valuable possession at the moment. I slipped it off my wrist and laid it down on the stairs leading up to the platform.

At the end of the worship service, the ushers dutifully picked up the bracelet and placed it with the cash offerings in our church safe.

Three days later, I received an unexpected check for \$1,000. I actually felt the heart of the Lord the moment I received it.

I had given Him something of value (the bracelet) and He was responding to my gift. It touched my heart. At the same time, I was very aware that my bracelet was of no use to our church and would sit in the safe indefinitely. I decided to give that money to the church and “redeem” my bracelet back.

Faith to Give in All Circumstances

This took place over 10 years ago. I also recall during those years having a high faith in God for His provision. Our church members also reflected those values. I’ve always had a deep love for the church, and my heart was to build it so it could effectively reach the lost. For example, my husband and I would be thrilled to empty our bank account for special outreach projects. I remember us giving thousands of dollars to our church building programs. We would make those commitments in faith and never had it in the bank at the time.

Still, the money always came, and it was with joy that we gave it. When we visited other churches, we were conscientious to leave a generous gift. We gave away jewelry and furniture and really tried to help others in need. We loved giving to missions as well and seemed always to be blessed with resources at the same time. We never went without. We’ve always had plenty left over.

Then in 2007-2008, our nation went into a terrible economic recession. Banks started failing. People all around my neighborhood were losing their homes. Unemployment was the highest I’ve ever seen. It made everyone fearful. The fear was overwhelming and caused many of our church people to pull back their tithes and offerings. Ron and I did not personally stop giving, but the feelings of fear were real.

I remember those “terrible” Tuesday mornings. We would receive the financial report from the weekend. I would panic and then I would go to our prayer chapel and pray until I found faith again. We knew several pastors who quit the pulpit during that

season due to financial stress. Also during that time, the Lord spoke to my husband to begin a citywide ministry to the poor. The prophetic word launched our City Reach ministry, which is still happening today. We both knew the proverb and understood this was God's way of preserving us:

"He who gives to the poor will not lack" (Prov. 28:27).

We've thankfully come out of that season still in ministry and still having our church. In 2015, our church members' tithes and offerings have increased. There is still, however, a feeling of caution on the people in regard to the economy. I am still waiting for the extravagant givers to be set free again, but I am confident this will be restored too. {eo}

Stay tuned Thursday for part two of this article.

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