



# Offering Myself

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Solomon, the fifth and youngest son of Bathsheba and King David, was only about 20 years old when His father handed him the throne of all Israel. And as if that wasn't challenge enough, David also commissioned him with building a grand temple to the Living God, God above all other gods.

Thinking ahead, David provided Solomon with all the materials he would need for such an immense task—stone, wood, gold, silver, fabric—for, as he told Solomon, *“Every part of this plan was given to me in writing from the hand of the Lord.”* (1 Chronicles 28:19)

Solomon could see the materials his father had gathered, stockpiled and ready for use. But there was so much that could not be seen! Who would perform the work? Who would craft the furniture? Who would forge the metals? Surely not Solomon himself, while governing the people and leading the army at the same time.

And who would staff the services of the Temple, once completed? Raising the necessary livestock, preparing and offering the sacrifices, keeping the fires burning and all supplies in stock?

Then David told his son, *“Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Don't be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. He will see to it that all the work related to the Temple of the Lord is finished correctly. The various divisions of priests and Levites will serve in the Temple of God. Others with skills of every kind will volunteer, and the officials and the entire nation are at your command.”* (1 Chronicles 28:20-21)

There's the answer Solomon needed! God would be with him, and the community of people would volunteer at his command.

It takes both, doesn't it? God and the people. God will not do the works required in our world directly; He works through people. And the people cannot accomplish the great task before them without the help of the Almighty.

## His Part, Our Part

And here's what we know: God will do His part; He has pledged Himself to it. But will we?

I once heard a story, based on common experience, that addresses this question.

This is a story about four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody.

There was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it.

Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it.

It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have.

David told Solomon, *"Others with skills of every kind will volunteer."* What joyous news that is to a leader's ears!

During the period of the Judges, Deborah (a judge) and Barak (the captain of her army) sang this song of victory: *"When the leaders lead in Israel, when the people volunteer, praise the Lord!"* (Judges 5:2)

When people do what is needed, it's a cause for celebration!

## Character of the Kingdom

The psalmist broadened the scope of expectation beyond buildings and battles: *"Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power."* (Psalm 110:3)

Volunteerism is characteristic of the Kingdom of Heaven that has come to us through Jesus Christ, for this is the day of His power—the Holy Spirit now dwells among us!

*"We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."* (Ephesians 2:10)

So, the power of the Spirit has come, the Kingdom of Heaven is here, and God has prepared beforehand the opportunity of good works—but do we walk in them as He intended?

We have believed the Truth, and have received the Life, and we are now in the Way. Or, are we just in the way, while others are wearing themselves out trying to do their job AND ours for us?

Jesus' 12 disciples were volunteers. He didn't hire them. He said, "Follow Me." They were responsible to support themselves along the way. Paul sewed tents, and so did Aquila and Priscilla.

Looking at the Church of Jesus Christ, we see the same thing. There are 3,260,000 adherents of Assemblies of God churches across the United States, and 37,700 ministers. That means that 99% of those who are active in AG churches are lay people—non-professional volunteers—who staff and teach our small groups, Sunday schools, children's churches, Boys' and Girls' ministries, worship teams, media teams, men's and women's groups, prison and hospital visitation teams, food collection and delivery, and a hundred other tasks that round out our ministries.

### **Give Freely**

Even those who receive pay for their ministry skills, usually volunteer many extra hours every week to see people reached and discipled and sent out. That's just the way it is. Volunteerism is the fuel on which the local churches run. Because Jesus has said, "*Freely you have received, now freely give.*" (Matthew 10:8)

What have you freely received?

- Mercy – forgiveness from God
- Grace – help from God
- Courage – the boldness of faith in Christ
- Wisdom – guidance from the Lord
- Provision – what we need and what we need to give away, from God
- Health – He-who-is-Life dwells consistently inside of you
- Power – the power of an endless, holy life
- Truth – the personal knowledge of Almighty God
- Life – the indwelling presence of the Eternal God

Of this, what are you giving away? What are you passing on to others?

That's what volunteering is all about! It's a way of gratefully acknowledging what Jesus has placed in our hands—by passing it on.

### **An Offering of Thanks**

According to Eugene Peterson (The Message), Paul wrote to the church in Rome:

*“So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering.”* (Romans 12:1)

Volunteering is the way to place yourself before God *“as an offering.”* It is what transforms your life into a fragrant gift of thanks to the Savior. Saying the words, “Thank You,” are important, but they’re never enough—not even for you. If they were, Jesus would only have needed to say, “I love you,” instead of hanging on a cross in our place.

Volunteering is the way to discover your spiritual gifts and cultivate your Christian skills. Spiritual gifts are not discovered in a vacuum, but in the context of need.

Here’s what I mean: 1 Corinthians 12 (all about spiritual gifts in the Body of Christ) ends with a challenge—*“You [only] want the better gifts.”* (God’s Word translation; We all hope to have gifts, and, if we get to choose, we want the *best* gifts.)

### **Show Him**

Burt Bacharach wrote a love song that Dusty Springfield made famous back in 1964, called “Wishin’ and Hopin’.” The song begins:

*Wishin' and hopin' and thinkin' and prayin'  
Plannin' and dreamin' each night of his charms  
That won't get you into his arms*

The message is clear: Real love takes more than just mental effort and dreaming. Bacharach’s answer? *Show him that you care.* It’s the same with Jesus; you’ve got to *show Him* that you love Him, by loving His children and others in His name.

That’s what Paul was saying also. The final verse of 1 Corinthians 12 is this: *“You [only] want the better gifts, but I will show you the best thing to do.”* From there, he launches into chapter 13 (the LOVE chapter), because loving others is the way to discover, and develop, your spiritual gifts.

Don’t wait for the Holy Spirit to meet you in some imagined cataclysmic experience of impartation— *start loving needy people.* Don’t wait to travel to some far and darkened corner of the world—start loving the needy people around you now.

Volunteering Christ’s love is the way to discover your gifts and cultivate your skills. Spiritual gifts are discovered in the context of need.

Just as John wrote to us: *“He has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their fellow believers.”* It’s a command. How do you obey it?

*Does it show?* Can Jesus see it? Can anyone else see it? (Not that it should be done FOR others to see; only that it should be tangible, so that is COULD be seen.)

Start with verses 4 through 7:

*1 Corinthians 13:4 Love is patient. Love is kind. Love isn't jealous. It doesn't sing its own praises. It isn't arrogant. <sup>5</sup> It isn't rude. It doesn't think about itself. It isn't irritable. It doesn't keep track of wrongs. <sup>6</sup> It isn't happy when injustice is done, but it is happy with the truth. <sup>7</sup> Love never stops being patient, never stops believing, never stops hoping, never gives up.*

When you've actually done all of those, you'll know what else to do. The Holy Spirit will guide you from there.

There's never a lack of need for love. And there's never a lack of supply of gifts. If only we understand how they work together.

## **The Great Lament**

So, let me conclude with this final thought:

I'm sure that many of you are familiar with the lamentations in the Book of Psalms, as the songwriters poured out their hearts about the violence and wickedness around them, and the weakness and selfishness within them. The Psalms, in fact, put words to many of our feelings, and give voice to our inward cries, encouraging us to bare our souls before God, who cares and listens to us.

And the Scriptures further encourage us to share our burdens with one another—with friends or family that we trust—and not to carry them alone.

But did you know this? The most tragic laments in the Bible are the ones that God Himself expressed. For with whom can He share His burdens? Who could shoulder His load of grief?

Here's one that is particularly apropos today, as God spoke from the pen of Isaiah:

*"The time for redemption had arrived. I looked around for someone to help—no one. I couldn't believe it—not one volunteer. So I went ahead and did it myself." (Isaiah 63:4–5)*

You don't have to be God to identify with the anguish of such care-less-ness, such help-less-ness. Every friend, every spouse, every parent, every leader, can remember such a time—when help was desperately needed, when there was no more time to wait, when action was required—action for which you were not prepared or equipped, in a time when you were already exhausted and in need of rest.

But what was to be done? The time was now! Everything was arranged in place. But there was no one else to help. It HAD to be done, and it had to be done NOW. *If only there was a volunteer!* But there was none. So you did it yourself. Already wearied. Ill-equipped. Better done by two. But you did it yourself.

God redeemed us BY HIMSELF. There was no human capable of helping. No angel sufficient to the task. God did it. For our sakes, and in our place.

Then, He *made* us capable; He canceled our debt of sin. He washed away our guilt and shame. He gave us His own Holy Spirit. He gave us new birth. He placed us in the Family of God (the Church). And He said, "There's still work to be done. Enter into My labors with Me. Work while it is Day, while you have Light."

He looks for a man, for a woman, for a young person, for an old person—for an available person, for a VOLUNTEER.

All He requires from you is your availability. He promises to equip you, if you answer His call. He promises to be with you, wherever He leads you. He promises to empower you, if you do what He asks.

*"His people will volunteer freely in the day of His power."*

This is the Day. Now is the time.

It could be you? IS IT YOU? Will it be you?