



*Exodus 35:30–37:24 – In Search of Excellence*

The Israelites step up to the enormous task of making the tabernacle. Bezalel and Oholiab are given special talent by God to facilitate this. God enables them to do great work and also enables them to manage others. Still, it's a daunting task; their management skills are taxed.

But they do it and do it well.

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Thank you.

Exodus 35:30–37:24 – In Search of Excellence  
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1 Exodus 35:30-36:1 (ESV)

*Then Moses said to the people of Israel, “See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold and silver and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, for work in every skilled craft. And he has inspired him to teach, both him and Oholiab the son of Ahisamach of the tribe of Dan. He has filled them with skill to do every sort of work done by an engraver or by a designer or by an embroiderer in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, or by a weaver—by any sort of workman or skilled designer. Bezalel and Oholiab and every craftsman in whom the LORD has put skill and intelligence to know how to do any work in the construction of the sanctuary shall work in accordance with all that the LORD has commanded.”*

The surprise here isn't that the LORD has given Bezalel and Oholiab great skills – we already knew that – it's that Moses puts them in charge. They will manage the construction of the tabernacle.

At first glance, the text doesn't seem to say that. The only thing new here is that the LORD *has inspired him* [Bezalel] *to teach, both him and Oholiab the son of Ahisamach of the tribe of Dan*. But as we'll soon see, Moses drops out of the picture while the tabernacle is under construction.

He's in the next few verses, calling Bezalel and Oholiab, and handling the contributions. After that, Moses isn't even mentioned for more than two chapters – from 36:7 through 38:20. Even then, Moses is only mentioned in reference. Moses doesn't really reappear until the tabernacle is complete.

*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.* – Exodus 39:43 (ESV)

Bezalel and Oholiab oversee the entire project. That's what they need the gift of teaching for. This frees up Moses to get back to his main role as the leader of God's people.

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Every Christian should contribute to the work of the kingdom. That's part of what being a Christian is.

But there's another level – overseeing. People who are willing to be responsible for things have more impact than people who just help. This is even more true in the 21<sup>st</sup> century than it used to be. Nowadays, many tasks are done by machines. It's the people who oversee (or program) the machines that make the difference between success and failure. The same principle applies when the work is done by people.

*The body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ* – 1 Corinthians 12:12 (ESV)

We tend to think of this in terms of doing things, not responsibility for things getting done. But when those body parts are fully functional, pastors are freed up to focus on the tasks only they can do.

The church kicks into high gear when people take over responsibilities.

2 Exodus 36:2-7 (ESV)

*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. 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, so that all the craftsmen who were doing every sort of task on the sanctuary came, each from the task that he was doing, and said to Moses, “The people bring much more than enough for doing the work that the LORD has commanded us to do.” 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, for the material they had was sufficient to do all the work, and more.*

This all sounds wonderful – until you read between the lines. The people are very generous, and this is glorifying to the LORD, but something’s wrong. *They still kept bringing him freewill offerings every morning.* It’s too much, and Moses has to put a stop to it.

So he gave command, and word was proclaimed throughout the camp, “Let no man or woman do anything more for the contribution for the sanctuary.” The troubling word here is “do.” The NIV has this as, “No man or woman is to make anything else ...”

The contributions that are now being refused are not gold and silver – those things came in quickly – they’re gifts people took time to make special just for the tabernacle.

These gifts are a labor of love, and many of them are finished or almost finished. The command to stop can’t be easy to hear. Remember, the call was for people with skill to help out. Now, many folks who thought they had something to contribute are being told, “We don’t need you.”

At least it’s not personal; the need has simply been filled. Still, hearing this has got to be deflating.

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This dovetails nicely with yesterday’s lesson. If you’re going to take responsibility for managing a task, think about the people you’re managing. That’s why people in these roles are called under-shepherds. They’re shepherding people.

Today’s passage is a profound example of how this can be tricky. People love to contribute their time and talents, but feelings can be hurt. Never casually ask someone to put their heart into something.

The incredible truth is that the impact you have on the people you’re shepherding is often more important than the project you’re leading them in. Jesus died to sanctify people, not to get new speakers in the sanctuary (or whatever the project is).

Get to know the people you’re leading. Do lunch, or some other nothing activity, with them just to form a personal connection. Figure out what their gifts are and scheme on how you can get them to grow.

You have to earn the right to be a nudge.

3 Exodus 36:8-19 (ESV)

*And all the craftsmen among the workmen made the tabernacle with ten curtains. They were made of fine twined linen and blue and purple and scarlet yarns, with cherubim skillfully worked. The length of each curtain was twenty-eight cubits, and the breadth of each curtain four cubits. All the curtains were the same size.*

*He coupled five curtains to one another, and the other five curtains he coupled to one another. He made loops of blue on the edge of the outermost curtain of the first set. Likewise he made them on the edge of the outermost curtain of the second set. He made fifty loops on the one curtain, and he made fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that was in the second set. The loops were opposite one another. And he made fifty clasps of gold, and coupled the curtains one to the other with clasps. So the tabernacle was a single whole.*

*He also made curtains of goats' hair for a tent over the tabernacle. He made eleven curtains. The length of each curtain was thirty cubits, and the breadth of each curtain four cubits. The eleven curtains were the same size. He coupled five curtains by themselves, and six curtains by themselves. And he made fifty loops on the edge of the outermost curtain of the one set, and fifty loops on the edge of the other connecting curtain. And he made fifty clasps of bronze to couple the tent together that it might be a single whole. And he made for the tent a covering of tanned rams' skins and goatskins.*

This all being done in accordance with the instructions in Exodus 26:1-14. The text here is the same as there except it's not in the future tense.

The tabernacle is basically a giant tent – which has to be portable. That's why the part that's *made of fine twined linen and blue and purple and scarlet yarns* is in two pieces, each 28 cubits by 20 cubits (42' x 30'). *And he made fifty clasps of gold, and coupled the curtains one to the other with clasps. So the tabernacle was a single whole.* Even half of it is a huge thing to fold up.

The same holds for the *curtains of goats' hair for a tent over the tabernacle*. In this case, one piece is even larger – 30 x 24 cubits (45' x 36'). I don't know how they got this to fit on a cart, but they did.

*But appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of the testimony, and over all its furnishings, and over all that belongs to it. They are to carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings, and they shall take care of it and shall camp around the tabernacle. When the tabernacle is to set out, the Levites shall take it down, and when the tabernacle is to be pitched, the Levites shall set it up. – Numbers 1:50-51a (ESV)*

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Some jobs are routine; they need to be done every week – childcare, making coffee, running audio/video, etc. These jobs are often the hardest to fill because there's nothing exciting or glorious about them. Yet they're surprisingly important. You almost can't have worship without them.

Prayerfully consider your role in these things. What tasks match your skills? Where might you fit in? And, like we've been discussing, consider that you might be called to shepherd one of these "flocks."

4 Exodus 36:20-38 (ESV)

*Then he made the upright frames for the tabernacle of acacia wood. Ten cubits was the length of a frame, and a cubit and a half the breadth of each frame. Each frame had two tenons for fitting together. He did this for all the frames of the tabernacle. The frames for the tabernacle he made thus: twenty frames for the south side. And he made forty bases of silver under the twenty frames, two bases under one frame for its two tenons, and two bases under the next frame for its two tenons. For the second side of the tabernacle, on the north side, he made twenty frames and their forty bases of silver, two bases under one frame and two bases under the next frame. For the rear of the tabernacle westward he made six frames. He made two frames for corners of the tabernacle in the rear. And they were separate beneath but joined at the top, at the first ring. He made two of them this way for the two corners. There were eight frames with their bases of silver: sixteen bases, under every frame two bases.*

*He made bars of acacia wood, five for the frames of the one side of the tabernacle, and five bars for the frames of the other side of the tabernacle, and five bars for the frames of the tabernacle at the rear westward. And he made the middle bar to run from end to end halfway up the frames. And he overlaid the frames with gold, and made their rings of gold for holders for the bars, and overlaid the bars with gold.*

*He made the veil of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen; with cherubim skillfully worked into it he made it. And for it he made four pillars of acacia and overlaid them with gold. Their hooks were of gold, and he cast for them four bases of silver. He also made a screen for the entrance of the tent, of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, embroidered with needlework, and its five pillars with their hooks. He overlaid their capitals, and their fillets were of gold, but their five bases were of bronze.*

Just making the frames is a staggering undertaking. Each frame is 10 cubits by 1.5 cubits (15' x 2¼') – and there are 48 of them.

Don't forget, it's not yet the Iron Age. This would have been a big project with modern power tools, and an enormous one with modern hand tools. They did it with bronze axes!

Never be intimidated by the size of a challenge when it's for the LORD.

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One of the main parts of growing in Christ is stretching our wings beyond what we thought possible. Normally, this takes a nudge from someone or some thing; big challenges are usually too scary for us.

So, don't go looking for some way to jump off a cliff for Jesus. Just be ready to jump when He calls. My accepting the call to write the DEEP was pretty much nuts. I had no idea what I was getting in to. But it was a call; someone asked me to take it over. Writing something like this hadn't even crossed my mind.

Are you ready for a leap like that? If not, you're holding yourself back. There are many jobs to be done. But the main reason you'll be called isn't so something can get done; it's so that you will grow. God relentlessly pursues our sanctification.

5 Exodus 37:1-9 (ESV)

*Bezalel made the ark of acacia wood. Two cubits and a half was its length, a cubit and a half its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. And he overlaid it with pure gold inside and outside, and made a molding of gold around it. And he cast for it four rings of gold for its four feet, two rings on its one side and two rings on its other side. And he made poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with gold and put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark to carry the ark. And he made a mercy seat of pure gold. Two cubits and a half was its length, and a cubit and a half its breadth. And he made two cherubim of gold. He made them of hammered work on the two ends of the mercy seat, one cherub on the one end, and one cherub on the other end. Of one piece with the mercy seat he made the cherubim on its two ends. The cherubim spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings, with their faces one to another; toward the mercy seat were the faces of the cherubim.*

The ark is the centerpiece of the tabernacle. The point of the whole thing is to provide a place for the LORD to meet with His people. The ark is where that will be. He will dwell above the mercy seat. But why call it the mercy seat? It could have been called the judgment seat, or the throne, or any number of alternatives. The answer becomes clear when we examine what will be done with it.

*“And he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the front of the mercy seat on the east side, and in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times. Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. Thus he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions, all their sins. – Leviticus 16:14-16a (ESV)*

The blood sprinkled on the seat is to *make atonement*. This propitiates God’s wrath and unleashes His mercy. This is the function that was fulfilled once and for all by Christ’s sacrifice on the cross.

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. – Romans 3:23-25 (ESV)*

God’s mercy is the heart of the gospel and the mercy seat is the heart of the tabernacle.

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Imagine how bad things would be if this was anything other than a mercy seat. Given how quickly the Israelites strayed from their promises and did things like worship a golden calf, a judgment seat would mean they’re toast.

Praise God for His brilliant, creative mercy. Just think how the LORD set this up in advance to play out – from the naming of the mercy seat to the cross.

6 Exodus 37:10-24 (ESV)

*He also made the table of acacia wood. Two cubits was its length, a cubit its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. And he overlaid it with pure gold, and made a molding of gold around it. And he made a rim around it a handbreadth wide, and made a molding of gold around the rim. He cast for it four rings of gold and fastened the rings to the four corners at its four legs. Close to the frame were the rings, as holders for the poles to carry the table. He made the poles of acacia wood to carry the table, and overlaid them with gold. And he made the vessels of pure gold that were to be on the table, its plates and dishes for incense, and its bowls and flagons with which to pour drink offerings.*

*He also made the lampstand of pure gold. He made the lampstand of hammered work. Its base, its stem, its cups, its calyxes, and its flowers were of one piece with it. And there were six branches going out of its sides, three branches of the lampstand out of one side of it and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side of it; three cups made like almond blossoms, each with calyx and flower, on one branch, and three cups made like almond blossoms, each with calyx and flower, on the other branch—so for the six branches going out of the lampstand. And on the lampstand itself were four cups made like almond blossoms, with their calyxes and flowers, and a calyx of one piece with it under each pair of the six branches going out of it. Their calyxes and their branches were of one piece with it. The whole of it was a single piece of hammered work of pure gold. And he made its seven lamps and its tongs and its trays of pure gold. He made it and all its utensils out of a talent of pure gold.*

The lampstand is a single piece of hammered work of pure gold. ... He made it and all its utensils out of a talent of pure gold. The lampstand doesn't sit on a table; it's like a floor lamp. But a talent of gold is less than a half-gallon in volume. How can a floor lamp be made from such a small amount of metal (especially soft metal)?

By hammering the gold over a wooden frame. That's how the lamp is large enough to stand on its own at floor height.

<http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/golden-lampstand/>

This contrasts with how the table is *overlaid with pure gold*, that is gilded with gold leaf. There, thin gold sheets are overlaid onto wood. That's how the mask of King Tut was made.

<http://www.ancient.eu.com/gold/>

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This is all about excellence. The least fancy thing in the whole place is as ornate as one of the most famous treasures in all antiquity.

Be challenged by this, but don't just think in terms of doing excellent things for the LORD. The main thing God wants to see be excellent is you.

You're the temple now.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. Who was your favorite boss?
2. Have you ever managed a group of volunteers?
3. Which area of Church work seems to be the best fit for your skills?
4. Do you ever feel like you're holding yourself back from growing into big shoes?
5. How, over the last year, have you seen God's mercy in action?
6. Where do you see impressive excellence?

*Items for prayer:*