



The Good Hand Of God, Part 1

Ezra 7:6-10

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Normally I use this space each month to address subjects, questions, or personal ruminations that don't come up in the normal week to week exposition of Scripture. This month is a little different. I want to tell the story behind the building of our new facility.

I know that many who are reading these words have started coming to Kootenai Community Church rather recently. Consequently, you only know that we are building a new facility and you don't know anything about what has brought us to this point. That is one reason for telling this story.

A second reason is that we might put down in written form, a history of God's dealings with us. I find myself telling the whole story from time to time to curious people who ask about the building program. Having it written down takes it from our memories and puts it down on record.

A third reason is that God's people at Kootenai might stand in awe at the wonder of God's gracious hand and glorify Him for what He has done among us.

Psalm 78 instructs us to *"tell to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wondrous works that He has done. That the generation to come might know, . . . That they should put their confidence in God and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments."* (Psalm 78:1-7)

I hope that in reviewing the way in which the good hand of our God has been upon us, that it might resound to His praise and honor, instill confidence in Him, His further guidance and provision, and increase our faith.

How It All Started

During 2001, it became obvious that we needed more

space. The Lord was blessing our church with growth in numbers and we had an average attendance ranging from 90 to 120 in a building that would not even comfortably seat 80. So we started to look at options.

The elders met to discuss ways in which we could accommodate for the current growth and allow for future growth to our church. All our discussions boiled down to four options.

First, we could alter the current building by adding a balcony in the sanctuary. Second, we could add on to the current building. Third, we could go to two services. Fourth, we could buy land and build a new facility.

As elders, we have a desire to impact the Christian church beyond just the borders of Kootenai. We have a vision to start a Christian School, a Bible College, or both. With that in mind, we decided to pursue the fourth option which seemed to be the only one that made sense in light of our desires.

How God Gave us Land

At this point, I should back up a little bit. For over two years we had been saving money. Our income had exceeded our expenses by \$2,000 to \$4,000 a month consistently. We were saving the extra money and in December 2000 we put \$10,000 in a 13 month Certificate of Deposit. At that point we felt that the Lord was allowing us to store up money, but we weren't sure for what yet.

It was a couple months after that that the elders started to meet and pray about expanding our facilities. Our prayer was a simple one and I remember praying it often, *"Lord, we can plan our ways, but You must direct our steps. Help us to make wise decisions. Direct us in the*

path You want us to take.”

I started talking to the realtor who had helped Diedre and I buy the lot that we built our house on. Her name was Pat Closson. She and her husband had attended church here for a couple of months and volunteered to help us with the transaction free of charge.

The first piece of property that we looked into was directly across the road to the south of the church building. At the time, the house on the lot was run down and hadn't been lived in for years. Similar vacant lots were selling for around \$20,000. We didn't figure that the house was worth much, so it might be within our price range. We had \$10,000 in a CD and about \$15,000 of available cash on hand.

Pat discovered that the owners didn't really want to sell and priced the two lots to reflect that. They were asking \$50,000 for two lots totaling one-third of an acre.

We decided to look elsewhere and see what turned up. At the time there was a couple acres available over by Coldwater Creek, a couple acres on the east side of Kootenai, and two acres on the other side of the highway across from the Conoco station. All those pieces were listed for far more than we could afford. For instance, the two acres across the highway was asking \$425,000.

So we asked Pat to look at vacant lots that were not listed. She came back with a 26 acre piece along Main Street in Kootenai owned by a Mr. Miller. It was only about 2 blocks from the church building and would be an ideal place for a new facility. Pat said that she thought the owner lived out of state and she would contact him to find out if he would ever be willing to sell. This happened in June of 2001.

About a week later, Mr. Miller walked into the church and shook hands. “Hi Mr. Miller.” I said. I recognized him as the man who lives in the house north of the church building. My office window overlooks his yard and I see him all the time. I had chatted with him on many occasions. I had no idea that this was **the** Mr. Miller who owned the land we were interested in buying.

He said, “I hear you are interested in buying a piece of my land over here.” I was shocked. I was thinking that he meant the lots north of the church building that his house sat on. We had never even considered buying his house. Then it dawned on me that he was the one that owned the 26 acres.

I said, “**You're** the Mr. Miller that owns that field.”

He said, “Yes I am. I got a call from a realtor saying you were interested in purchasing part of my 26 acres.”

“Yeah, we are. We are looking at building a new church building and we are needing some land.”

“Well”, he said, “when you figure out what you want to spend on the land, you come over and talk to me and we'll work out a price. No realtors, just you and me, and we'll sit down at the kitchen table and come to an agreement.”

The first thing we needed to determine was that the City of Kootenai would allow us to build a church on that piece of property. We didn't want an uphill battle with zoning issues, or property use issues. So on August 6th, I attended the Kootenai City Council meeting to present to them our plans.

We asked the Lord to grant us favor with the council. If our desires to buy that land and build a church were acceptable to them, we would proceed, if not, we would look for something else.

They were estatic! The mayor said, “We would love to see you build a church there and we hope you can get the land from Mr. Miller.”

So we decided to make Mr. Miller an offer. In October 2001, we had a special elders meeting and asked Pat to come and give us some idea of what the land was worth and how we should proceed.

First, Pat informed us that the piece we wanted to buy was actually 6 and one third acres. Second, she gave us some information on what similar properties were selling for in the area. Directly across the street from the land we were interested in was a five acre piece that Habitat for Humanity had purchased a couple years earlier for \$72,000. That worked out to \$14,400 an acre. That was almost double what we figured we could afford!

After Pat left, we had a time of prayer asking God to direct our steps and make His will plain to us. We decided that John Kinne and I would go over and sit down to discuss the purchase with Mr. Miller.

We had no idea what kind of a price Mr. Miller had in mind. We figured that if we waited for the CD to mature, and used all our available resources depleting our cash reserves we could probably afford to pay \$6,000 an acre. That would be \$36,000. We also figured, that if we

needed to, we could probably raise around \$12,000 if we had to. So we decided to offer Mr. Miller the following terms:

1) We would offer \$6,000 an acre for the 6 acres. We expected that Mr. Miller might counter with something much higher. We hoped that we could settle on \$7,000 an acre but figured that worse case we could go as high as \$8,000. We determined that if we could not get the land for \$8,000 an acre, we would simply tell Mr. Miller that we couldn't go higher than that and we would look for something different.

2) We still had much of our money locked up in a CD that wouldn't mature for another 4 months. We didn't want to cash in our CD early and pay a penalty, so we decided to ask Mr. Miller if he would accept \$5,000 down and carry the note at whatever interest rate seemed agreeable to him. Our intention was to pay off the land as soon as our CD matured and we could raise additional funds if necessary.

So those were the terms we decided to offer: \$6,000 an acre, \$5,000 down, and ask him to carry the note. John Kinne and I went over on the appointed day to talk to Mr. Miller. We went in and he fixed us coffee and we sat down at his kitchen table.

After a few pleasantries, he asked, "So, you boys ready to work out a deal on that piece of land?"

"Yeah." I replied. "We are prepared to offer you \$6,000 an acre for your 6 acres."

As if he had not heard a word I said, he replied, "I was thinking that \$30,000 would be a fair price." At first I thought he meant "per acre." I thought, "Wow, he sure is in for a rude awakening!"

"For the whole six acres?" I asked hopefully.

"Yeah. \$30,000 for the six acres."

Hardly able to believe what I was hearing, I asked, "So . . . that would be \$5,000 an acre?"

He said, "Yep. Is that agreeable to you?"

I don't know about John, but I wanted to pinch myself. I could hardly believe what I was witnessing! "That sounds fair" I said. I didn't want to argue with that. I had never been in a situation where the seller had offered a lower price than the buyer!

I said, "If we are agreed at \$5,000 an acre then we just need to work out the terms of payment."

He quickly replied, "How about this: You give me \$5,000 down, I'll carry the note at 1/2 a percent interest rate, and you can work out whatever monthly or annual payment schedule you want." The going interest rate for such a note was around 6.5-7%.

I couldn't believe it! It was as if Mr. Miller had listened in on our elders meeting. He was repeating back to us the same terms that we had decided to offer to him. We had asked the Lord that He would grant us favor with Mr. Miller and that these terms of the sale would be acceptable. God not only did that, but He actually gave us the land for \$1,000 an acre less than we had offered. Truly, the Lord does exceedingly beyond all that we ask or think! (**Ephesians 3:20**)

The last thing I wasn't sure about was the 1/3 of an acre. You see the piece of property was not 6 acres, but 6.3 acres. I told Mr. Miller, "The realtor told us before we came over here that the piece is actually 6.3 acres and not 6. So should we add 1/3 of \$5,000 to the \$30,000 to cover that third of an acre?"

"No." he said, "Just keep it at \$30,000. That is a good round number for us all to work with."

I signed the papers and closed on the purchase of the property on November 9, 2001.

Consecration Sunday

We moved to the gym of the Kootenai School in March of 2002. After our CD matured we paid Mr. Miller the remainder of the price of the land. That was about April of 2002.

We wanted to move forward with designing a facility and working on a foundation. However, with the purchase of the land and the equipment necessary to set up church in the gym, we had depleted our funds.

We were faced with the issue of how to raise money for the construction of the new facility. The elders were in agreement that we didn't want a long drawn out stewardship campaign where we were begging people for money every Sunday and always mentioning the building fund. We also didn't want to have dozens of bake sales, car washes, and rummage sales for fund raisers and we didn't want to borrow the money for the facility.

We were asking God to provide what was needed and we determined that we would wait on Him for that

provision. At the time, I was preaching through the book of Ezra and we were seeing how God provided for the reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem. Seeing God's hand of provision was encouraging to us and we decided to raise money the same way they did in the Old Testament.

When Moses needed funds for the construction of the tabernacle, the children of Israel appointed a day and they all brought of their resources and contributed it for that cause. (**Exodus 35, 36**) When David purposed to build the temple in Jerusalem, he had a worship service where the people contributed on one day to the construction of the temple. (**1 Chronicles 29**)

So we determined that would appoint a special day to bring our offerings to the Lord for the new facility. We would call it our Consecration Sunday where we would first consecrate ourselves to the Lord, then we would give of ourselves to the Lord. Our giving to the building fund would be an act of worship and trust. We set December 15th, 2002 as our special day.

We asked people to keep that day in prayer and to lay aside resources to be offered to the Lord on that day. We reminded people that this offering was to be above normal giving to the Lord and that we were to pray for the Lord to bring us extra to give on that day!

We set our goal at \$35,000 and began asking God to bless us with that amount. Our Consecration Sunday came and we planned a special worship service and a special sermon from 1 Chronicles 29 on the subject of consecration. After our worship, the preaching, and a time of prayer and personal consecration we took up an offering. While we sang some closing songs at the end of the service, the treasurer and the other elders counted the offering in the office. After the singing I announced the total: just over \$36,000!

For those of you who were there, you remember just how emotional a time that was! What a tremendous blessing it was to see God answer our prayer and provide so abundantly through His people, all to the praise of His glorious grace! What God did through His people that day was a testimony to His power, grace, and glory! And God wasn't finished.

Exceedingly Abundantly Beyond

Every Tuesday at noon I meet with a group of area

pastors for fellowship and prayer. After one of those meetings, Pastor Larry Nelson from Lakeview Bible Chapel came up and said to me, "Jim, you know that there are only a few people left at the church in Lakeview and I have felt for some time that I should be pursuing a counseling ministry in a larger city." In fact, Larry had gone to Master's College to get a degree in Biblical nouthetic counseling.

"Does it look to you like you will be leaving soon?" I asked.

"Yes, there is a church in the Seattle area that has contacted me and is asking me come on staff as a counseling pastor. The leadership at Lakeview has discussed our options and prayed about what to do, and we unanimously feel that the church should close down and we think Kootenai (Community Church) should have the facilities."

I said, "Larry, I don't even think that is an option for us. We are in the middle of a building project of our own, we are trying to raise money for that and we can't afford to buy your facilities in Hope."

"No." He said. "We want to give them to you."

"Give them to us?"

"Yes. Sign over the deed. Hand over the key. Do you what you want with them. Start a church, start a school, you can sell them if you want. Take the money from the sale and use it to build your new facility in Kootenai. As far as we are concerned, we can think of nothing better for that facility than that it could be used to help the ministry at Kootenai."

I was overwhelmed. I met with Larry several more times to discuss the transfer of the facilities. During those meetings Larry expressed that Lakeview was giving us the facilities because they trusted our Eldership, agreed with our doctrine and our philosophy of ministry, and believed in our vision for ministry.

Local attorney and friend of both Kootenai Community Church and Lakeview Bible Chapel, Steve Smith, helped with the legal transfer of the property. By Fall of 2003 the transfer of the facilities was complete. We waited almost 6 months before we listed the property for sale.

In the fall of 2004, we had an offer for \$350,000 that we were only minutes from accepting when a second offer of \$450,000 came in. We accepted that offer and on February 1, 2005 deposited \$418,832.50 into our building

fund.

Here is how I like to think of it: we offered all we had to the Lord. In consecrating ourselves to Him and giving of ourselves to Him, He blessed us with \$36,000. Then He stepped in and did exceedingly abundantly beyond what we asked for or could even have imagined! All this, He has done in such a way that He has been honored and glorified.

Seeing the Hand of God

For those who have eyes to see, the Hand of God is obvious. When Ezra returned from Babylon to minister in Jerusalem, the Scripture says that the “good hand of his God was upon him.” In fact, in Ezra 7 and 8, it says **six** different times that the Hand of God was upon Ezra. (**Ezra 7:6, 9-10, 28; 8:18; 22, 31**) The success of Ezra’s journey to Jerusalem is attributed to “the Hand of God over us.” (**Ezra 8:31**) Any success we have in building a new facility, spreading the gospel, preaching the word, evangelizing the lost, or serving the Lord is always due to the “Hand of God over us.”

Who but God could have arranged the purchase of that property the way He did? Who but God could have blessed His people and moved in such a way as to provide \$36,000 through such a small group of people? Who but God could have dropped land and buildings into our laps to provide nearly half a million dollars for a building fund? If that is not the Hand of God, then I have never seen it. If those events do not evidence the moving and blessing of God then I have never seen the moving and blessing of God.

We have seen all this not because we are a great people, but because our God is a great God. We have received this not so that we can glory in our accomplishments, but so that we can boast in the Lord and His work.

Let me offer a couple of observations. First, I believe that God blesses His people when His people are committed to honoring Him and waiting on Him. That is what **Ezra 8:22** says, “The hand of our God is favorably disposed to all those who seek Him.” If we wait on Him, seek Him, trust Him, look to Him, honor Him, and glorify Him, then his hand of blessing will be over us.

Second, I believe that God blesses His people when they honor His word. **Ezra 7:9-10** says that the “good

hand of his God was upon him. For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.”

So our focus will continue to be what it has always been: to equip the saints for the work of ministry by preaching and teaching the Word, and to trust God to honor both His Word and the confidence of His people in Him.

For those who are rather new to Kootenai Community Church, I hope this has served to give you a history of God’s work among us in connection with the building of the new facility. For those who have been here a while, I hope this has served to remind you of the faithful hand of God and bring to your mind afresh the reality of God’s blessing and moving. Do not forget His benefits!

For all of us, I hope this has served to increase our faith and our confidence in God. We tell of His greatness in order that we “should put our confidence in God and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments.” (**Psalm 78:7**)

There is not a thing here in all of this story that a single man or woman can take credit for. Nothing has been done that might result in praise to men. It has all been God’s blessing. He gets the honor. He gets the glory. Quite frankly, that’s the way I like it.

Now, did you notice the title of this article? *The Good Hand of God - Part 1*. The rest of this story has yet to be written. I am convinced that we have only witnessed the beginning of the good hand of our God. We will see Him do so much more, if we will trust Him and ask Him to do great things, all to the praise of His glorious grace! Stay tuned for *The Good Hand of God - Part 2* sometime in the future.

Without Wax-

