

# Raising Local Resources

## All Without Money

Jean Johnson, guest author

In mission circles, I hear the question: “How much money is it going to take?” more than I hear “How much of the Holy Spirit is it going to take?” Jesus knew what fulfilling the Great Commission would take: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water but in a few days you will be baptized in the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5).

Luke, the writer of Acts, describes the day that 3,000 people joined the 120 believers (Acts 2:41). Money was not mentioned as the “deal maker.” Actually, money did not enter the equation at all. What or who did play a role in this people movement for Christ? The Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit empowered Peter to speak the gospel with boldness and clarity. The Holy Spirit moved upon people’s hearts with conviction. The Holy Spirit, using Peter, did this all without money.

As affluent North American churches and missionaries, we have communicated through words and actions that we cannot fellowship as a community of disciples (called the church) without an infusion of money. In the book of Acts, we see that the community of believers “had church” and God added to their number 3000 daily. Did money enter the equation this time? It sure did, but not through foreign donations unleashed on a local community of believers. Rather, the local believers shared selflessly with one another. If outsiders had donated money to help advance the local church in the Book of Acts, they could have crushed the Holy Spirit-generated giving of the local believers.

As we read on in Acts, the community of believers grew from 3,000 to 5,000. Was money the “bottom line this time?”

As a matter of fact, Peter exclaimed to the beggar at the Gate of Beautiful: “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk” (Acts 3:6). Money did not add 2,000 more disciples. A miracle of kindness from God to a beggar and the disciples’ proclamation, along with suffering and obedience led to the incredible growth of this movement for Christ. God, through the disciples, did this all without money.

The community of believers’ first written prayer was not at all about money. They did not say, “We cannot continue to spread the gospel without money. God, extend your hand and provide us with ample resources.” Rather, they prayed for boldness and that God would perform signs and wonders through the name of Jesus.

As I read story after story in the book of Acts, money does not play a role in the conversion of masses of people. The apostle Paul indeed received occasional support from churches that he planted, yet he worked to support himself. Paul and his companions had to pay for lodging, passage and food along their missionary journeys. The book that Luke authored through the Holy Spirit is not about the “acts of money,” but the Acts of the Holy Spirit through the apostles.

Have we allowed material and economic abundance to be the hallmark of our mode of operation rather than (or more than) the acts of the Holy Spirit and our humility, boldness, suffering and obedience? Have I found it easier to minister out of affluence in order to gain an audience rather than go through the grueling work of building relationships? Have I sidestepped suffering, making my resources too valued to those with whom I share the gospel? While serving as a missionary in the Buddhist nation of Cambodia I

observed that we missionaries were often tolerated for the money we brought, more than the message we had to share. Does the easy access to the money missionaries may bring cheapen the meaning of the gospel, resulting in shallow conversions and half-hearted disciples?

Glenn Schwartz, the author of *When Charity Destroys Dignity*, once received an email from a missionary in Zambia. The missionary voiced concern that his mission may have been viewed by the local culture as Mission Jireh (the mission, our provider), rather than Jehovah Jireh (God, our Provider). If so, have we not cheated those we seek to serve?

Throughout my missionary experience I have seen the harm money can do to the Church of Jesus. Like the camel herder, many people have been led to believe that Christianity requires lots of “stuff” and lots of money. Such an expensive form of Christianity is dependent on the affluence of outside cultural groups. Let’s redouble our efforts to make the Good News all about the power of the Holy Spirit to transform lives. Remember, Christ himself said – about desiring the good life – “But seek first his [the Father’s] Kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” Transformation of the heart comes first. f



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