

Trusting *the* Source

Not our own resourcefulness

—Greg H. Parsons

It was a few weeks before the end of the school year in 1980, and my first mission trip was just ahead. I was heading to Southeast Asia, and the money for the flights was due that week. While I wasn't what you would call a starving seminary student, I had no idea where I would get the money to fly to and around Asia for a summer.

Sunday morning, with a little struggle, I gave my gift to the Lord in the offering and prayed for the resources needed for this trip.

I was working with the college group, and when I returned from the worship service to the college class room there was an envelope addressed to me. It contained an anonymous gift of cash worth about four times what I'd just given in church!

I'm *not* suggesting that there will be a direct financial gain when we give—dozens of times the funds I thought I needed haven't come in. Nor am I suggesting that we give because of what we will get. However, we are promised God's blessing when we give (Luke 6:38; Phil. 4:17; 2 Cor. 9:6).

God was also teaching me a little more about trusting Him, which seems like the best return on any investment you can make.

After a thorough study of scripture since that time, I've found that the spirit of giving goes far beyond the 10 percent some hold dear. When you look at the Old Testament, the

prescribed offering was actually more than 25 percent. Some of that covered what our government tries to cover now, like funds for the poor and truly needy. It seems to me like the church should and could do a better job in this area.

Additionally, in at least two Old Testament references, giving with a willing heart went *beyond* those tithes and offerings (Exod. 35 and 1 Chron. 29). Other passages speak of a free will offering—like Deuteronomy 16.

In the New Testament, a similar sense of grace giving is emphasized above any rigid pattern (2 Cor. 8, 9). Paul speaks there of the Corinthians "abounding in this gracious work" like they did in "everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge." It seems like they did well in these areas but not in giving out of the abundance God had supplied with the grace that God gives. Do you know of any churches here *or* around the world that suffer from this same problem?

I recently heard that the wealthiest 5 percent give less than 1 percent of their income while the poorest 5 percent give an average of almost 4 percent. While these statistics are of the U.S. population as a whole, they tell us something about how we look at money. This speaker's application was that the more you suffer, the more you identify with those who suffer and thus give. While we all have probably thought that if we were the ones that had the wealth, *we*—of course—would be different. But I wonder.

When I was in the last year of seminary, I went to a Bible study with one of my professors. He was leading this study in a wealthy "Beverly Hills" area of the city. We went to a beautiful home and had the Bible study. Afterwards, while eating from the most amazing dessert spread I have ever seen, I was talking with a man at the study whose wealth (on paper at least) greatly surpassed all the others' there combined.

But as I thought about the whole evening later that night, I realized how dangerous money can be. I was

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glad that I didn't have to report to God for how I used millions, or in the case of the one man, billions of dollars. But I believe I'll report to Him on what I *do* have and how I use it—in treasure and talent.

My wife and I have lived on support for 19 years and we've never been in debt. That is a tribute to God and his people. But it doesn't mean we haven't struggled to trust God.

We all know pastors and others in ministry around the world, who are distracted by *not* having enough funds just as much as folks with money can be. At times it is because we are not trusting God. Or, we may *expect* those with funds to automatically see our need to give! One sign of this being a problem is if those in full-time ministry feel it is their *right* to receive out of that abundance. Another is if they don't have the heart and practice of giving themselves.

Often, those in full-time ministry think our "trust" of God boils down to money. We might not say that, but we feel it—with project and jobs around us un-staffed. But it may be because God wants us to learn a little more about trusting Him again. 🌐



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