



Giving According to ~~His Riches~~ ~~The Needs Our Western Expectations?~~

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Pastor, if your church will officially associate with us and put our organization's name on your church, we will pay you twice what you are getting now."

The offer was simple. It appeared to be sensible. Some of the 400 pastors (in India) who received this offer probably wondered, "Wouldn't it be better for my congregation if I were able to focus more time on my pastoral duties?" We don't know what they actually thought, but they decided to take up the offer, and so those 400 churches—10% of the churches of one denomination in India—left and joined the organization wooing them.

We do know what the regional leader for the first denomination said when they left: "We really don't mind "losing" 400 of the 4,000 churches we have there. We will see new churches planted—the Church is growing! The bigger concern is that these 400 churches will stop growing now that their model for growth is one they cannot duplicate."

Underlying this true story are predominant Western assumptions about what our money can do. These grow out of our own patterns of church.

1. Churches around the world, especially the poorer ones, deserve a full-time pastor just like us.

Most, perhaps the vast majority, of the growing churches of the world do not have a full-time pastor—much less one trained in a seminary. Probably they will never have one, and the Bible gives us no reason to believe they should have one.

2. Church meets once per week on Sunday morning, usually at 11:00 a.m. local time.

Where do we see that pattern in the New Testament? We read about not forsaking our gatherings. We read about setting aside our gifts weekly (probably because of the way in which people were paid in New Testament cultures). Nowhere does the Bible say we must meet weekly, nor is it clear who is to meet. I know of an African tribal church that meets every night! No one there is the pastor; instead, the believing elders of the village share the leadership.

3. Churches around the world need a building.

Some have argued that church buildings enhance "identity" in a town or city, often helping believers to "stand up" to other, influential religious groups. Yet we see no church buildings in the New Testament. Believers met in the Temple, or in homes, or while making tents, or under a tree. That doesn't make buildings wrong for us and others today, but we should be prepared to re-evaluate the style of ministry we've developed in the last 100 years.

We know that when believers give, they are blessed (2 Corinthians 8-9, Philippians 4). Why would we want to deprive less-wealthy believers of such a blessing? I know that we don't intend such deprivation, yet providing for local needs from a global church often undermines their own giving, blessing and growth. They may still give, but somehow they lose ownership and responsibility under God.

What can we do?:

1. We should give to our local church, and, as we do, feed our local friends with global insights that help them in strategic focus.
2. We should give to global needs and opportunities. I could tell you of a dozen valuable projects right now.
3. We should learn to give in an mature way, not like we did when we were younger in the Lord, but with increasing wisdom and increasing volume as we are able. We should also look to give to strategic, high-impact ministries that may be less visible or are simply overlooked by the media. 🌐



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