

Raising LOCAL Resources

Glenn Schwartz

What is in Your Hand?

Years ago I had the privilege of meeting a Christian worker in East Africa who told me an inspiring story. She was once assigned to oversee a local congregation that met in an uncompleted church building surrounded by an overgrown plot full of trash and weeds. Feeling a bit overwhelmed, she approached the Lord about how to proceed.

In prayer she felt the Lord was asking her to consider what gifts and abilities she had to bring to the situation. Her prayer went something like this: "Lord, you know I don't have a lot to offer this congregation. The only thing I seem to know how to do well is work with children." God encouraged her to start there.

She met with the children, but she could not get them to bring their friends. When she asked them why, she discovered that they were ashamed to invite them to a place that was a virtual dumping ground. The site was simply depressing. When she learned about their concerns, she suggested to the children that on the coming Saturday morning, they take some time to begin clearing the lot, something they could do.

On that first day they only cleared an area about ten meters square. What they did not anticipate was the affect their effort would have on the congregation the next morning. When the adults came for service the next day, they saw this "clean spot" next to the unfinished church building and wanted to know what was going on. So my friend told them how the children had expressed their shame with the appearance of the church yard and decided to do something about it.



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This sparked a desire for renewal in this congregation. The adults decided that if the children cared that much, they would all help them to clear the rest of the lot. Not only did they clean up the churchyard, but they installed windows and door frames and raised enough local funding to finish the building.

How had all of this begun? One person offered to the Lord what she had to give—her gifts and abilities with children. God asked Moses what was in his hand in Exodus 4:2. It was a simple staff that God was able to turn into convincing proof that He had the power to accomplish His purposes in Moses' life for the good of the children of Israel.

There is an amazing story of people living in an East African refugee camp who also learned that they had something in their hands to give to God. Many had fled with hardly anything more than the clothes they were wearing, but one man had with them the notes from a stewardship seminar he had just recently attended. He decided to see whether in that setting they had something to give to God. He challenged the believers in that camp to pool their rice rations and come together for a "fundraising meal"! It worked so well that they did it a second time! In the end, these refugees collected \$14,000 worth of local currency, which they used to purchase blankets for prisoners who were sleeping on bare floors! Truly, little is much when God is in it.

Jesus challenged His disciples to feed thousands of hungry people in Mark 6:37, and they replied that they had no financial resources for the task. Then He said, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." The five loaves and two fish that they were able to bring to him He then multiplied into enough food to satisfy five thousand people, with twelve baskets full of left-overs to spare!

When we say we have nothing to give to God—whether that is money, time, natural abilities or spiritual gifts—we deprive ourselves of God's special blessing. We also benefit others who may need what we have to give.

Only God knows what He can do with a ten-meter square patch of cleared ground, offered to Him with joy. And only God can take an ability to work with children and use it to bring renewal to an entire congregation. f

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