



RAISING LOCAL RESOURCES

The Importance of Assumptions

Glenn Schwartz, Executive Director, World Mission Associates

When it comes to the dependency syndrome, much of our success or failure can be traced to the assumptions with which we begin. A colleague in WMA ministry, Jean Johnson, says it this way: "What we do on day one [of our ministry] affects day 100, and day 1,000 and day 10,000." The assumptions with which we begin are like small, self-fulfilling prophecies that point us toward success or failure in the long-term. Proverbs 23:7 reminds us that as someone thinks in his heart, so is he.

How is unhealthy dependency created in the Christian movement? It often happens when we assume that the people we are called to serve are "too poor to give anything back to God." This assumption affects the way new believers see themselves and how they respond to claims of Christ upon them! Sometimes new believers conclude that they are poor and always will be. Think about that in terms of a beginning assumption. If not challenged, that attitude can remain with them for a lifetime, even several generations. Though what they have to give may seem to be small, when it is given, God can multiply it, thus making it greater than anyone might have thought. A church leader in East Africa once said that if we give nothing to God, when it is multiplied it is still nothing!

Along this same line, Jean Johnson, whom I mentioned above, coined the phrase "premeditated sustainability." Some missionaries have intentionally and intuitively sowed the seed of the gospel in such a way that new believers learned to give something to God in return for the gift of salvation. Others felt they should be "excused" from giving to God because they appeared to have so little. It is important that those coming

to Christ begin with the assumption that they have something to give to God, thereby avoiding the unhealthy dependency which so easily develops. Imagine how different newly-started churches would be if they began with that assumption from the very beginning.

While one faulty assumption can lead to long-term dependency, another assumption leads to the privilege and joy that accompanies giving to God. Consider the story of the Macedonian believers in 2 Corinthians 8. The Apostle Paul described them as being in severe trial and extreme poverty. Yet they had two things in their favor: they had a *desire to give* and a *joyful spirit*. Out of their severe trial, overflowing joy and extreme poverty (verse 2) the Apostle Paul said they *urgently pleaded with us* for the privilege of giving (verse 4). Paul obviously did not begin with the assumption that they were too poor to give to God's work.

Some time ago in this column I told a story that illustrates the point I am making here. A church in West Africa decided to evangelize about 30 villages. They knew it would be costly, so they prepared a budget, the equivalent of about \$100,000 in CFA francs. One church leader assumed that was too costly and that it could not be done. However, a second leader suggested that they change the beginning assumption and ask everyone to bring what they could – whether an egg, a chicken or a cow. (2 Corinthians 8:12 reminds us that the gift is acceptable according to what one has.) When they launched the project on that basis, they raised not only the entire budget, but they *had enough left over* to buy a vehicle for the project.

Notice that one man's assumption was

that it *could not be done*. Another began with the assumption that it could be done. In a sense, both men would have ended up being right. If they had listened to the first man, the project would most likely have failed because they began with the assumption that "it could not be done." Thankfully, the assumption of the second man prevailed, and victory was achieved and success realized.

Assumptions are very powerful things. They tell us something about the condition of our faith. If we believe something can be done with God's help, we will most likely proceed on that basis. This does not mean that we should become unrealistic and with human effort alone try to create a man-made miracle. God would not be pleased with that kind of self-serving effort. But when our efforts are rooted in the heart of God and then communicated to the hearts and minds of the people we serve, we can avoid the unhealthy dependency that might otherwise develop. In Exodus 35, Moses launched the drive for resources for the building of the tabernacle by saying "it is what the Lord commanded" (verse 4). In 1 Chronicles 29 King David launched the fundraising drive for building the temple by saying "this palatial structure is not for man but for the Lord God" (1 Chronicles 29:1). Notice that both of those stories begin with God-centered assumptions.

It is God-honoring to begin with faith in our hearts and strive toward a goal that comes from God – bringing people to a commitment that preserves dignity. We can do this counting on God's provision because He is not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9). 🌐