

# Can Poor Christians Obey The Great Commission?

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Alex was born and raised in Brazil, where he grew up in a church initially established with help from British and American missionaries. He served with IFES in Portugal, with COMIBAM in Brazil, as Director of Intenational Operations for Partners International, and as a consultant on cross-cultural dynamics for Interdev. Alex helped found International Partnering Associates, an international fellowship of missions partnering trainers and consultants.

God's way of reaching the nations is through his people. We can begin with Abraham, a man called and sent by God. Isaiah reports to us in his 66th chapter, verse 18, that God would raise some of his people and send them to the nations. The Spirit set apart Paul and Barnabas in Antioch to go on his mission. And, of course, there is the ultimate Sent One, Jesus Christ himself.

Jesus directs his followers to make disciples in the familiar Great Commission passage of Matthew 28.

My point is this: In none of these examples does the sender or the servant raise the question of money. In fact, at least in one instance, Jesus instructed 72 of his disciples to not take any money or material possessions with them on a mission. And yet, "The seventy-two returned with joy and said, 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.' (Lk.10:1-18). Apparently, their lack of material resources did not hinder their ministry.

I contrast this with our modern missions movement and our obsession with money. Budgets are often the first consideration. This contrast bears some serious examination. How has money gone from being a humble, seldom mentioned servant to the primary concern (I am not exaggerating here) of mission enterprises, especially from the West?

The Great Commission was given by

Jesus to a small number of followers in Jerusalem. It was a big assignment: make disciples of every nation by teaching them to obey all that Jesus taught.

How was that small band of people supposed to fulfill such an enormous task without well-endowed Christian foundations or large foreign churches with financial capacity to adopt projects? The early church had no affluent "North" to appeal to for funds. In Peter's magnificent words to the poor cripple at the temple gate, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk" (Acts 3:6).

At this point someone may say, "Wait a second! Are you saying that we should not need money at all? Didn't Jesus and his disciples carry with them a money purse, and didn't they have a group of ladies who helped fund their work?"

That is precisely my point: Jesus and his disciples were able to do what God desired while relying on the locally available resources. There was no talk of how much more they could have done if only they had more money.

The question I want to raise is not whether or not we use money. Rather it is how we think of money in relation to our obedience to Christ. My point is that in the New Testament, money for ministry was not a topic of discussion. If we examine each mention of money in the New Testament, it never is about how to




fund ministry. The closest instance is Paul's fund-raising campaign to help the starving believers in Jerusalem. And that was for disaster relief, not a strategy for funding ministry.

What, then, if not money, fueled the emerging community of followers of Jesus the Son of God?

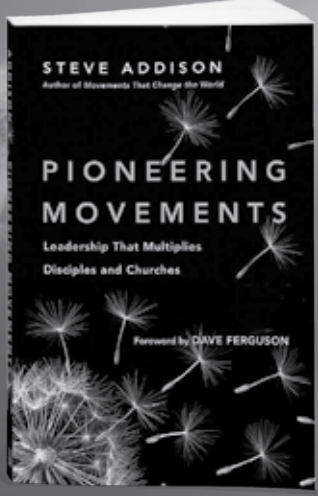
With the Great Commission of Matthew 28, Jesus makes no mention of money. But he did say three important things:

1. I have all authority to send you and to bless you in your going. Surely, as you go, you will need food and shelter and other basic needs. So does everyone else you meet along the way, as it has been since the creation of the world. Do what you must do to provide these things for yourself and those who depend on you. But what will enable you to make disciples is divine authority. And that I have and give you.
2. Teach those who receive you with good will to obey all that I have commanded you. You don't need to look hard to know what it is you are supposed to teach, for you have been with me and learned from me.
3. I will be with you all the way until your task is done.

Have you noticed how these things get lost in the talk about money in missions? I wonder what would happen if we focus on these three things in all our mission planning. At some point, perhaps at the very end and almost as an afterthought, like in the New Testament, we might talk about money.

Imagine how this would transform the understanding of our brothers and sisters in less affluent countries as they consider their calling and role in reaching their own people. 


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