

## WHO GIVETH THE INCREASE?

Non-Profit Organizations, Business Growth and Fund Raising

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Intense anxiety hung over the US delegation during a most joyous moment in Christian history. Some missions leaders attending the Global Consultation on World Evangelization (May 1995 in Seoul, Korea) faced the possible demise of their dreams. The prospects of quickly doubling monies invested by their organizations through an apparently reliable foundation on the East Coast had faded. Indeed, they would even lose the seed money they had invested in a rapid growth scheme sponsored by the foundation. All the usual reactions of grief were present. Rationalization quickly overtook denial. "We really didn't lose much. We did it in good faith. It was the Lord's money anyhow. Many credible organizations were in the scheme." etc. etc.

Without exulting over another's misfortune, may I alert the Christian non-profit world to some critical issues? To avoid the perception of opportunism, I had originally asked that this response—part manifesto, part pathology—be published anonymously. With the passing of time and with some trepidation, I now feel free to disclose my identity!

A quick personal background so I can connect with you as a Christian leader: I lead a small organization ministering in the poorer economies of the world. As in your case, the enormity of needs overwhelms our capacity for fund raising. But the smallness of our organization and the specificity of our vision may make the fund raising pressure less acute than yours. The temptation to rapidly expand in the face and name of God-given opportunities is always present. They exist, persist, and gnaw at my soul in the night watches. I have deliberately chosen a slow route though donors, fund raisers, and king-makers assure me "this thing could take off" if we pulled out all the stops.

Ironically, trustworthy friends had recommended that we present our projects to that foundation just a week before it failed. We were told that our program would easily fit the foundation's most rigorous criteria for favorable consideration. I probably would have "bought in"

to the opportunity and been sunk. God's grace protected us. I agonize over why He didn't choose to protect others.

In response to this funding debacle, allow me to suggest a mindset, heartbeat, and lifestyle toward money and growth in Christian ministry. These are not formulae for ministry success or failure. These are, instead, offered simply in an attempt to incorporate biblical integrity into your perceptions of God's will for your ministry.

**First, develop a biblical *mindset* about money, growth, and the ministry.**

*Is money deity?* Of course not. We know better. Money is not the God of your ministry. Neither should the ministry be your God. God is God, ontologically and functionally. Your ministry must live and move and have its being in Him. Unfortunately, money can function like a deity in ministry situations. It becomes the ultimate arbiter of ministry decisions.

Biblically speaking, money asks to be "loved" and "worshiped." It tends to idolatry—as the focus of life and as the determiner of God's will. It promotes false values because happiness, security, and contentment become defined by money. It conveys a false sense of well-being. It communicates an illusion of self-sufficiency. Mammon wants to grow by "using" the money you have to get more money—a clear cause of the recent tragedy.

Spiritually speaking, money subverts the spiritual life by strangling faith and power. Money confuses ethical standards by introducing new tensions. It clouds desires. We suddenly covet what we don't have or need and can find good reasons for these desires. If you don't manage money, your life and ministry will be mangled. Money pushes you upward on the economic spectrum. Conveniently but sadly, we assume that upward mobility is always appropriate. It causes the pride of life and possessions. It can be used to control others.

Since the Scriptures are to intersect our spiritual existence, here are some policies I have attempted to follow in determining God's will for our ministry by monetary circumstance. (1) We will not decide God's will by the presence or absence of money. This conviction takes "faith" as we ask to find God's will regardless of the availability of money. (2) We will not decide God's will by the presence or absence of need. This policy takes "work," as it necessitates telling people

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about needs. (3) The absence of "money" and "need" show the need for *faith* so that we can trust God for money *before* needs arise. (4) The presence of "money" and "need" show *direction* for action without *determining* our action.

*Does growth show effectiveness?* Business growth is not a sufficient indicator of ministry impact. Growth and impact are superficially, not intrinsically, related. Statistical growth in ministry or receipts reveals responses to certain kinds of activity *in comparison with* a previous period. It does not necessarily reflect ministry success. We have to wait for an ultimate divine reckoning of our ministry success.

Effectiveness is not simplistically measured by quantifiable growth. You can run an excellent \$1m organization and an ineffective \$2m one. Do not measure success by size, growth by numbers, or accomplishment by movement in staff, square feet, paper production, or budget. *Downsizing without embarrassment and growing without pride are critical spiritual virtues.* "Bigger is better" is a culturally based assumption that is often questioned by culture itself. For instance, does the assumption apply to faculty-student ratios at universities?

We must distinguish between strategic planning and prophesying. Business decisions (especially expansion of expenses) are too often made on the basis of what we think will and must happen in the future. Since our strategic planning document calls for a certain number of staff in upcoming years, we contract for larger office space now. That's not planning. That's prophesying in non-prophet organizations! Every Scripture on the frailty and fickleness of life militates against such predictability of the future. Who knows? God might even have you "grow" faster than your document predicts.

Board members, donors, and staff may chomp at the bit to see you "grow." You may want to "grow," especially when your peers are "growing." However, the "growth" of sister organizations is not a statement about you. It is a statement about them, externally. Be convinced of your appointment to ministry, your sphere of work. Be faithful. Let God give the increase.

Seek private and, perhaps, anonymous opportunities to serve. Do not aspire for the big opportunity or the large donor. They will come to you in time, in God's time. Promotion comes from Him. God will

exalt you in due time. Oh yes, when *you* think it is due time, it is probably not.

When you sense the arrival of God's moment for your organization, be extra careful about your own wretchedness. That moment may begin with God, but the momentum may be entirely made by you. Let God continue to surprise you—and not only in monetary terms. If God creates unsolicited opportunities and affirmation, He will also sustain the growth without manipulation, greed, or force.

It takes as much fortitude not to grow as to foster growth. You must sense God's timing in these matters. Pray over growth issues while you are growing, because unwise growth can devastate you and your organization.

*Is ministry to donors a ministry?* No! Not unless that is your stated mission. Settle once for all that you won't be donor driven. Donor drivenness causes confusion between the purpose and result of ministry. You will notice organizational and personal disorientation if you are donor driven. Very soon your ministry will begin to fit donor sentiment, expectations, and priorities. Your ministry will be reduced to a ministry to donors.

I am told that I consistently break a cardinal rule of donor relations, namely, that one's ministry constituency and donor constituency should substantially overlap. Churches provide the best example of this rule. Donors don't give unless you minister to them. While I regularly break the rule, I don't intentionally do so. I understand the realities of the situation. Our board of directors is confronted by this issue because our ministry and fund-raising regions are a great distance apart. How can we possibly expect people to give without personal massaging? The name recognition that results from lavish personal attention could result in better giving. However, our primary reason for existence is to proclaim Christ in target regions outside the United States. We must adhere to that mission regardless of the cost.

If you adhere to your divinely appointed mission, you may have to graciously exclude donors. Excluding large donors seems unthinkable, but they can't be allowed to set the parameters or conditions for your vision. Believe me, many donors have already excluded you. Excluding certain donors often results in including other donors. Do not fear losing donors over a mission that changes lives.

*Is donor relations the mission?* Evaluate your activities in terms of money and hours spent. Then ask: has donor relations become the real, surrogate mission of this organization? Even if your stated mission is to raise funds, separate penultimate from ultimate purposes. Fund raising is *always* a means to the greater goal. You must carry on a ministry to donors, but distinguish between organizational mission and donor relations. Even your fund-raising departments should not view ministry to donors as the defining purpose of the organization. It is really disheartening how much a president's role is reduced to fund raising as the *raison d'être* for his existence.

Further, don't revise your mission statement to fit donors. Donors, especially the spiritually mature ones, will eventually adjust to your mission statement. When that happens, there is magic and mystique between your organization and these donors. They will find all sorts of ways to help you even as you give them the joy of investing their funds wisely. You might even be able to name a building after them, but your mission won't be compromised.

Remember, you and your donors are working together under God for the accomplishment of the mission that God has given to your organization. God has raised the organization for this time. It is God who also raises donors for a time. So maintain a godly relationship between organization and donor. This will include a duty to instruct believers (and yourselves) who are rich to be generous to those who are not rich. Grow them (and yourselves) to a biblical view of success, which holds material success as immaterial in evaluating total effectiveness. Teach them about personal stewardship rather than private ownership, contentment rather than acquisitiveness. Gently nurture them into a biblical view of giving.

Tell donors what they already know but need to hear repeatedly. They do not have to give just to your organization. Match up their vision with other organizations, though you may think your ministry is more strategic than others. Promote other organizations to plausible donors, even though you could make a good case for how precious your ministry is in the sight of God. Don't take responsibility for whether potential donors financially participate in your cause. It will relieve you of wrongful burdens. Do take responsibility for helping donors thoughtfully deliberate about what they do with their money. This will enable you to relate to them without conflict of interest.

By the way, a less than absolute commitment to fundraising also helps you in your choice of board members. We do want our board and our staff to place our organization in the higher end of their giving. Yet their presence or influence on the board (or staff) is not contingent on the amount or frequency of their giving. Neither is their giving a full reflection of their heart commitment to the ministry. Do not choose a board member based on ability to give to you. His or her friendship, giftedness, skills, organizational needs, and, more critically, coalescence of vision are the important ingredients.

Monitor your mindset concerning money, growth, and the ministry frequently.

**Second, let's pursue a *heartbeat* for ministry rather than growth and money.**

Weigh your passions. Where do they lie? Ministry and/or money? Can you keep them apart? Watch your heart, your deceitful heart.

The Lord Jesus implied that money possesses a charismatic personality. It invites our accolades. Although we sound pious in our publications, it is possible for our hearts to seek after money for money's sake. Jesus also said that those whose work is motivated by money are hirelings, not shepherds. Peter notes that we must not pursue sordid gain. Elder-quality people are free from the love of money, stipulates Paul.

The old adage, "money follows ministry" is not simply a truism about donations, but should reflect priorities in planning, budgeting, and implementation as well. Here I am concerned about projects created to generate money under the guise of ministry. There is entrepreneurial genius to these projects, but I question the very existence of these kinds of projects and the organizations that perpetrate them. We must constantly reject projects that primarily carry a donor rationale. And we must beware of too easily gliding into the donor mode of thinking about *ministry* projects. Don't create projects in order to generate money. First generate projects for ministry and then creatively plan fund-raising strategies.

Guard your heart, your depraved heart, constantly.

**Finally, some random suggestions on a *lifestyle* that matches your mind and heart about money, growth, and the ministry.**

*Mailings:* In "The Dark Science of Fund-Raising by Mail" (*New York Times*, May 28, 1995, p. E6), Erik Eckholm speaks about how "scientifically honed techniques goad people into sending money to perfect strangers." Provoke outrage, fear, guilt, pity, or self-interest. "Appeal to their basest passions." Mail "test letters" that vary the prose, envelope size, even the color of the signature. Design letters to reach the gut, not the brain. They are written that way for one reason: it works. Create powerful opening paragraphs, include a P.S., call for action, and use a devil! Eckholm concludes, "And it's even less clear that well-reasoned, toned-down prose will ever win out in a business that is about one thing above all else—raising money."

His last comment should separate Christian fund raising letters from "the dark science and art" of direct mail. Our underlying purpose in mailings should not be to raise funds. The *results* may actually generate money, but our *purpose* is simply to more effectively communicate vision, opportunities, and accomplishments to the entire constituency with whom God has blessed us. Be especially wary of putting anyone on your mailing list who hasn't asked to be there. Watch how you acquire names for your mailing list. Your letters should be designed as a piece of ministry communication, not as a mail-order catalog. When you attempt to raise funds through direct mail, there should be no confusion about your intent, no competition with other ministries, no chimera. Let your letter writers and fund raisers be thoroughly baptized with these values.

At our organization, we tout leanness, nimbleness and wisdom as core values simply because our customers (i.e., our beneficiaries, not our donors) make do with far less than we have. We don't want to portray a slick, clever image that communicates insobriety and wastage. Simple sophistication (not cheap class) is what we have pursued. It is a daily struggle to apply this mindset. Anything that seems extravagant should be underwritten by designated gifts. This will help protect you from excessive criticism.

Never coerce or manipulate anyone in any way. Enlist people's help in meeting true needs by clear communication that reflects joy, gratitude, need, and integrity. Permit *them* to decide what they will do with God's money, especially whether they will pursue your suggestions on how the money is to be used. You are not trying to "get" or "get at" their money.

*Funding Policy:* Evolve a sound policy of fund raising. For example, differentiate between *projected* and *predicted* income. The former appropriately comes with James' prefix, "if the Lord wills." The latter is sheer presumption. I know of ministries who bank on the upcoming demise of aging or ill donors and their maturing estates. We ought to wisely live with a future that cannot be guaranteed by our donors life-term or intent.

We understand, of course, tensions in faith-based operations. We are always abandoned to seeking God's direction by His provision of resources to begin or continue a project. Organizations may determine that a significant project may not be started until all funds for a project are committed, or more likely use a level of spending approach to continue phases of a large project. In either approach, fervently honor a board-approved process. If a project requires board authorization and the board desires to use the level of spending approach, do not start the next spending phase unless you have achieved the stipulated resource level. You may be nearly there with a deadline fast approaching. You may be tempted to go on the promise of "predictable" gifts. Stick by your stipulation even though the best minds in ministry or business may disagree with your considerate spirit. Godly faith moves projects forward, but runs on the rail of godly wisdom.

Offer to return designated funds if the projects don't materialize or are oversubscribed. At the least, give donors a chance to redesignate their gifts. Most will not want their money back. If you ever have excess funds, don't enhance your life style or create new programs in order to spend money. Instead, reduce your fund raising appeals. Report hidden costs to your donor constituency. And be sure to report failures. Your vision is worth supporting in spite of occasional failures.

*Friendships:* Cultivate an inner circle of friends to whom you show attention without the intention of getting money. Do not focus friendship only on those who can give much. People shouldn't be your friends just because they are donors. They can be donors because they are your friends. I lead a weekly Bible study for a group of wealthy individuals. I did not specifically speak about our ministry until I had taught them for a year. I still haven't spoken about money. Other parachurch leaders have been welcomed to present their projects to the group. The group knows my ministry doesn't run on thin air. Though it may never come to pass, I am confident that a few from this study group will eventually turn out to be our best supporters and fund

raisers, simply because they are my friends. Indeed, my hesitation gives me authority and courage to share what the Bible says to us on pertinent issues of money.

I remember asking another close friend, a large donor, not to give last year. I wanted to ponder my motivation for this friendship. Would I still call him and pray for him often? Fortunately, the friendship still stands. So don't make friends only with those who can give large donations. If you can't show attention to a guppy, how can you take care of a really big fish? James tells us that God is against partiality. Let your friendships be based on vision and chemistry, not exploited by spiritually-laced cunning.

*Lifestyle:* We all tend to live a culturally acquiescent life under the pretense of ministry effectiveness. I find that ministries want to keep up with the latest of technology for enhanced productivity. Ministers prefer to dine at the finer restaurants on donors' money. After all, the Lord's inherited must wear the best clothes, travel first class, and relish fine foods. Leave out the beer.

Whom are we deceiving except ourselves? Donors don't live or give to support our life style. If you like fine foods or hotels, pay for it yourself, or at least pay the difference. Be ruthless with yourself and your expense reporting. It doesn't take much to rationalize the most outlandish behavior in this area. Ask if you can justify your conduct to your donors without elaborate explanation and embarrassment. Be a "tight wad" with other people's money and loose with your own. Is an expensive telephone call really necessary? Would a note do? Should you use an envelope when you could use a rubber band? Could you use the back of scratch paper to receive faxes? Shouldn't you turn off the lights in the rest room when not in use? Mix leanness, nimbleness, and wisdom in your business culture. Perceptions of supposed efficiency will always carry on a war with perceptions of supposed leanness. It is usually best go after efficiency, but you had better make a defensible case that will convince your donors.

The sacredness of the donor's dollar is similar to the sacredness of the taxpayer's dollar. Christian leaders should set examples of frugality, the kind we expect from our government officials, but don't always get. Again, be generous with your money, not with your donors' money. Give to your own organization. At least give enough to cover those perks.

*In conclusion.* Learn to wait and be content. Don't be impulsive when it comes to purchases, hires, or implementation of strategy. Unfortunately, we equate impulsiveness with decisive leadership. By all means stay away from "faith debts." If you are into an "amounts of faith" theology, assure yourself of this: it takes more faith to believe that God will provide before and during the program, than after you commit yourself to a non-negotiable program and hold donors hostage to your presumption.

I close this brief with a note on grace, for I don't want to be hard on you, though I must be hard on myself. Grace covers sin, transforms foibles, and enables us to cope with upward or downward mobility. In the meanwhile, let's plant and water. Let God give the increase. Honor and riches come from Him. Any time you are tempted to manipulate honor and riches, withdraw, fall on your knees and repent.