

## afraid of raising support?

". . .The three-and-a-half hour flight from Los Angeles to Minneapolis crept by slowly. Every minute seemed to produce a new anxiety. I was going home to ask people to financially support my new ministry.

"...Three weeks had passed since my parents greeted me at the Minneapolis airport. While waiting to board my return flight, I stood staring blankly out the lobby window. My heart didn't know quite how to feel. I was stunned, yet relieved. Although I survived scheduled breakfasts, lunches, and numerous dinners, late night coffee gatherings and presentations in church services, I had secured no pledges of financial support. Was there a lesson to be learned? Was this a testing of my faith? All my predictions of the people "most likely to support me" had crumbled. I boarded the plane with \$2 in my name, discouraged and wondering how God would provide. I decided to spend the money on headphones to watch the in-flight movie.

"...Back in Los Angeles, I waited nervously. In my mind, I raked through the trip's events, wondering if my whole game plan of appointments and presentations had been a flop. Did I miss anyone I should've talked to? Was I too pushy? Did people understand my ministry?

"Three weeks later, I got a letter from a friend I had run into at the Minneapolis airport. It was my first support pledge and check. He was raising support to go to Africa as a missionary pilot. I hadn't shared much about my ministry in our conversation at the airport, and I certainly didn't expect money from a fellow support-raiser. It was obvious that God--not my support-raising efforts--was responsible for this money.

"I'm currently rounding into my second year of living on support. I'll admit it's a faith-stretching experience. As I look at my card file of financial supporters, I see that they are fewer than I expected. Yet as I reflect over the past months, the amount of money that's come from surprise donors amazes me. Again, my predictions of where my support will come from crumble and God's faithfulness to provide continues."

*Bonnie Bishop wrote this account of her own journey. While everyone's story is different, Bonnie's experience is not unlike many others in this venture of raising support.*

### Answers to tough questions

Ever feel that raising support is just a "second-class" task? Ever wonder what the Bible has to say about it? Here are some straightforward answers to tough questions from someone who has raised support for ten years.

*Is raising support biblical? It seems lazy and selfish to ask people for money to support my ministry*

Raising support is not simply a form of Christian begging. When Jesus entered a new town, he regularly accepted the hospitality of others and instructed his disciples to do the same (Matt. 10:11). Jesus didn't just receive money from people on the "most likely to give" list, either. Luke records that Jesus even accepted monetary gifts from women, a culturally unacceptable practice at the time (Luke 8:3).

It's no surprise that you or anybody else might doubt the biblical basis of raising support; the New Testament records individuals and churches who didn't believe in the idea either. Take the Corinthian church: These Christians felt their missionary should work for a living (1 Cor. 9:3-6). Because of this attitude, Paul never asked them for financial support (vs. 15). Yet the whole chapter defends his right to receive financial assistance from them. Later, Paul scolded them for their immature view toward him and their reluctance to support him when he wrote, "I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you" (2 Cor. 11:8).

Throughout Scripture we find God expects His people to support those involved in full-time service. He instituted a tithe as the means to support the Levites (Num. 18:24, Neh. 13:10-13). And throughout the history of Israel, God promised to bless those who invest in this work (Pro. 3:9-10, Mal. 3:10).

Paul said emphatically to the Corinthians, "The Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel" (1Cor. 9:14). And John wrote Gaius saying that it was a good thing to support missionaries because "it was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans" (3 John 5-8). •

*Isn't it more spiritual to let only God know about my needs, rather than to publicize them to churches and individuals?*

It may seem more spiritual not to solicit funds and just pray about your needs. But there are other biblical approaches.

New Testament missionaries weren't exclusively "faith" missionaries, who made their needs for support known only to God. Paul's life offers three patterns for raising support:

- Asking No One But God. At times, Paul made no efforts to raise support. He simply made do with what God provided. Sometimes that was more than sufficient; at times he went hungry. "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:12-13). Paul never wrote that he prayed for financial support, but we can assume that during these lean times he presented these needs to God.

- Making Your Needs Known. At other times, especially at turning points in his ministry, Paul explicitly asked other Christians and churches for financial support. "When I go to Spain...I hope to have you assist me on my journey" (Rom. 15:24). The original language here confirms that Paul was asking for monetary assistance. Paul also encouraged churches to support other believers financially who once worked directly with him (Rom. 16:1-2).

- Using Personal Earnings. Paul supported himself and his co-workers by making tents on some occasions. He states in Acts 20:34, "You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions." Seasonal or part-time jobs can appropriately finance ministry.

In summary, the Bible doesn't rigidly prescribe one method of raising support over another. Rather, it gives us freedom to be led by the Holy Spirit according to our situation. I have found that to be obedient to God, I've needed to practice all three methods at some time or another. •

*Would it be a lack of faith on my part if I looked only for a salaried missionary job, rather than a support-raising position?*

Maybe not. Individual support-raising isn't always God's will for missionary workers. Raising support may seem harder, but it sure isn't more holy. Many outstanding denominations and mission boards offer salaries to skilled missionaries. They've found that there's not necessarily a correlation between the ability to minister cross-culturally and the ability to raise support. The support-raising missionary has no corner on the lifestyle of "living by faith". That quality of life should characterize all Christians (2 Cor. 5:7).

I guess the bottom-line answer to the question is this: you're not qualified to look for a salaried missionary position unless you're willing to raise support. Anyone unwilling to do whatever God asks won't be much use to the Lord in whatever situation he finds himself. •

*I'm willing to do what God wants, but right now I simply don't feel as though I could ever raise support. Can you help?*

I think a lot of people, including me, find themselves in your shoes. Let's face it, raising support is uncharted ground for most of us. In the back of our minds, we fear that as missionaries who raise support we will be financially insecure and we'll put our families in jeopardy. The truth is that at times we will. Jesus spoke from his own experience when he cautioned a young aspiring missionary, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (Luke 9:58).

Some people feel that raising support is tantamount to accepting Christian welfare. Yet the Bible strongly states that this is part of God's economy, His way of financing the spread of the gospel. Therefore, raising support isn't "un-Christian." Maybe the real problem we face is that raising support feels so "un-American."

As Americans, we are supposed to be "rugged individualists" who refuse handouts and stand on their own two feet. Financial independence is the goal. The real problem with raising support, then, is not that it's at odds with any practice in the Bible. Maybe your problem with raising support (and mine) has more to do with it being counter to the American way of life. •

*By Jay Gary; © World Christian Magazine*

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