

A Role for a Sending Team's Financial Advocate:

SUPPORT ADVOCACY

A missionary's financial advocate can gather a whole team of believers who will talk to a few friends about helping support the missionary.

● The Rationale

Missionaries raising their own support is a recent development.

(Note: Tentmaking—working to provide your own funding—is an ancient and viable means of God providing for missionaries. But tentmaking isn't the focus of this paper. See the Post-Perspectives unit on [Business As Mission](#). Rather, we're focusing on the tradition of missionaries raising their own support.)

Prior to the 1860s, virtually the only missionaries sent out from North America went as “employees” of their denomination. That is, like most of today's denominational missionaries, the denomination provided the funding. Then began the formation of “independent faith missions” which require individuals to raise their own support to go. About 70% of North American missionaries are now from faith missions.

The traditional Western methods of raising support actually worked well for several generations. Believers were told of the need, they gave, and missionaries went. However, in the past 20 years—during the infamous “me-decade”—several factors began merging into a perfect storm that now clouds missionary funding.

The American mission movement is stymied by the difficulties of support raising.

Right now, 40,000 qualified North American missionary candidates are attempting to raise the financial support to go. This doesn't even count the missionaries now on the field who struggle with underfunding.

Even those who are successful in support-raising are finding that it takes an average of two years to meet their budget—three years if operating expenses also need to be raised. With proper training, of course, that timespan is drastically reduced; The BodyBuilders Support-Raising Bootcamps (www.TheBodyBuilders.net), for example, guarantee that if candidates follow the training, they can raise full support in just 100 days.

Yet in a recent survey, The Finishers Project found that the #1 obstacle for people to move into mission work is their aversion to support-raising.

Raising support is a necessary part of the work for most missionaries today. Most mission agencies will provide training in support raising to assist their missionary candidates in their task. Yet, there is also tremendous opportunity for the senders to get involved and help change this statistic and this attitude toward support raising.

● The Principle of Advocacy

Advocating the cause of vocational ministry workers—as well as that of the poor and of needy believers—is the Scriptural norm.

“One of the greatest missing teachings in the American church today is the reminder to men and women that nothing we have belongs to us.”
— Gordon MacDonald

“In the U.S., Christians continue to accumulate record wealth while giving away proportionately less than we did during the Great Depression.”
—GenerousGiving.com



God always provides what He needs for His work—but sometimes the middlemen don't pass on the funds.

Last year \$24 billion was embezzled by church staffs! This is \$2 billion more than the whole world's giving to missions (gordonconwell.edu/ockenga/globalchristianity/IBMR2007.pdf). But we're not talking about church staffs hoarding God's provision so much as the overall Church misappropriating God's funds.

Sometimes God's people obediently release those resources for His purpose; sometimes they don't. (See Haggai 1 where God's people misused for their own houses what God had provided for rebuilding His house.) Sometimes a disobedient Church can waste and misdirect the resources God has given for His work.

Many of those 40,000 missionary candidates who struggle to raise support in North America are thus left to ponder in guilt and frustration whether:

- a. God doesn't really want them in ministry.
- b. They don't have "enough faith."

The real problem could simply be that they're support-raising in a Christendom where believers aren't clearly challenged to pass on God's resources to those in vocational ministry. (Much like the problem of trying to understand why your life is not going well—when you may be in the midst of a people undergoing judgment. No matter how faithful you are, your life is affected by the state of the Church around you—as the faithful but confused Jeremiah was when his people were being led into captivity.)

God, God's leaders and Scripture urge us to support ministry workers.

- God provided the resources to His people to support the Old Testament priests and Levites, the full-time religious workers of their day:

I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the Tent of Meeting (Numbers 18:21).

- God provided resources to Jesus' followers such as Mary, Martha and Lazarus in order to support Him "out of their own means" (Luke 8:3).

Note: The idea that missionaries are supposed to be so super-spiritual that they go out without funding is bad Bible. Jesus initially did send out his disciples without provision and told them to eat and drink "whatever they give to you; for the worker deserves his wages" (Luke 10:4-7). That bold approach was only for the short-term: Later He said, "If you have a purse, take it, and also a bag," (Luke 22:35-36). The cavalier idea of just "leaving it all to God"—presuming on supernatural provision when you step out in ministry—isn't a matter of "living by faith."

The phrase "living by faith" nowhere in Scripture applies only to ministry workers. It's *the just* who shall "live by faith" (Habakkuk 2:3-5 & Romans 1:17), which applies to all believers.

North American Christians are now used to NOT giving personally to missionary support.

In fact, even among those intending to become missionaries, only 5% now give to help support a missionary!

Currently about 40,000 missionaries are attempting to raise support. Those who can often have to work at it for two to three years.

- God provides the resources to His people to support elders who direct the affairs of the church since “the worker deserves his wages” (1 Timothy 5:17-18).
- God provides the resources to His people to support “those who go out for the sake of the Name” (3 John 5-8):

The Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:14).

The Bible tells us to initiate giving to those in vocational ministry, not to expect them to, on their own, “raise support.”

The Old Testament Levites didn’t go door-to-door raising their salaries. Instead, leaders *advocated* their support as God’s people were simply taught to tithe.

In the New Testament, neither Jesus nor the Apostles asked sustenance for themselves. Other than the Romans 15:24 phrase (*See sidebar.*) and another vague reference, Paul *never asked for himself.*

Paul did often compliment and thank his readers after they had sent him support. His gratitude and his ministry to those who supported him is a clear model of the giver-worker relationship; yet, again, Paul virtually never asked for himself. He did, however, model the biblical principle of *advocating for others.* (See the most blatant example of Paul’s advocacy in 2 Corinthians 8-9, in which he urges the Corinthians to give to the saints in Jerusalem.)

God tells us to give to those in vocational ministry. God’s leaders tell us to give to those in vocational ministry. Maybe we should be telling each other—particularly our “non-mission-minded” fellow believers—to give to those in vocational ministry. Each of us can advocate the funding of ministry workers such as missionaries.

● **Practicalities of Advocacy**

The Word is adamant about giving to those in vocational ministry. It’s not adamant about exactly how that happens, but there are distinct advantages to recruiting a team of advocates who will advocate on behalf of a missionary:

- Advocates can be boldly upfront about a missionary’s qualifications—whereas a missionary extolling her/his own virtues can come across as arrogant.
- Missionary candidates are limited to their own, sometimes small networks. Advocates can talk to friends in other networks—even if the friend has not yet met the missionary. In his advocacy to the

The verb in Romans 15:24 to be “helped on my way” can equally be translated “accompany me.” We do think it means Paul presumed they would outfit him for the one journey to Spain, but it’s a slim phrase on which to build an entire teaching that missionaries— and only non-church-staff ministry workers—are to itinerate, asking anyone who will listen, for their own fulltime salaries and ministry expenses. Further, it’s obvious this reference is a presumption that the Romans would provide a sort of “one-time gift” for his trip to Spain; Paul did not pointedly ask them to support him long-term.

Corinthians, Paul could be very straightforward about the merits of supporting the Jerusalem Christians even though the Corinthians didn't personally know them. If a missionary knows 100 people and those 100 simply advocate the missionary's ministry among 2 or 3 of their friends, the missionary expands her/his network by 200-300%.

Breaking into networks of believers who are not now personally supporting missions:

- Taps into the latent, massive reservoir of resources among the non-mission-minded—90% of the Church.
- Raises mission awareness in the local church.
- Blesses the non-mission-minded with a fresh release of God's grace. (See the P.S. at the end of this article.)

If a friend of an advocate senses that giving to help support this missionary is one of the "good works which God has prepared beforehand" for him/her to do (Ephesians 2:10), the missionary can then connect personally. During the span of the giving commitment, the missionary ministers to and blesses the new friend just as she/he does any of the ministry sending team.

- The advocate doesn't need to know all the details.

The advocate simply needs to trust the missionary candidate and the strategic value of the missionary's work. The missionary her/himself can later fill in the gaps of personal and ministry information.

- A team of advocates can share ministry vision all at once.

It takes months or years for a single person or couple to locate and talk individually to hundreds of people; yet if 100 advocates simply talk to two-three of their friends, the missionary's support needs can be considered by 200-300 people in one weekend.

● And so...

A missionary's sending team should have a Financial Advocate overseeing funding details, advising in financial matters. Yet that Financial Advocate can also help a missionary find and orient an entire team of advocates who will help raise needed funding. After all, it's scriptural that *believers advocate the support of others*.

—William Stearns
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The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.

—Psalm 24:1

How shall they proclaim unless they are sent?

—Romans 10:15

We who are on missionary assignments for God have a right to decent accommodations, and we have a right to support for us and our families.... You know, don't you, that it's always been taken for granted that those who work in the Temple live off the proceeds of the Temple...? Along the same lines, the Master directed that those who spread the Message be supported by those who believe the Message.

—1 Corinthians 9:4-14

P.S. What Giving Does

Giving to those who “go out for the sake of the Name” (3 John 7) is a powerful way God releases blessing in your own life. The Bible is clear that when we give, God gives not only through us but to us as well. Unfortunately, this principle is often distorted and even exploited in some circles as a form of greed: If you send in dollars to some splashy ministry, God must then make you rich.

What Giving Does In You

What the Bible actually does teach is that God brings more grace into your life when you give:

Each should give what he has decided in his own heart to give.... And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work (2 Corinthians 9:7-8).

This passage is a play on words since the original Greek New Testament meaning of *grace* is...“giving”! That is, as you give financially, God enlarges your ability to give in all sorts of ways, such as in good works. He doesn’t promise dollars in return, but He does promise to “enlarge the harvest of your righteousness” (2 Corinthians 9:10).

The Apostle Paul exhorted the Corinthians to give to Judean believers they’d never met—just as you might give to missionary partners you’ve not yet met. As you take that step of faith, God re-invests the profit of His grace into your life much as a business owner re-invests profit back into the business to expand its capacity:

You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion (2 Corinthians 9:11).

(In case someone tries to interpret that “rich in every way” to mean you should expect lots of money in return for giving financially: Paul already clarified to the Corinthians that being “enriched in every way” means “in all your speaking and in all your knowledge” (1 Corinthians 1:5). If God enriches you also financially, wonderful; but that’s not primarily what Scripture promises.)

What Giving Does Through You

Your giving and the expansion of grace in you brings results that can span the globe through the ministry of your missionary partner. Paul wrote:

- *Through us (your missionaries) your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.*
- *This service...is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.*
- *Because of [your] service..., men will praise God (2 Corinthians 9:11-13).*

But there’s still more that God promises in the cycle of your giving. Those who minister—your missionary partner—and those who are ministered to will thank not only God, but will also thank you for the grace you demonstrate in giving:

And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you (2 Corinthians 9:14). ■

1. A missionary candidate asks friends to be advocates.

2. Advocates are forthright in asking their own friends to support the missionary.

3. Anyone interested is then contacted by the missionary who shares vision, answers questions and initiates the new sender into the missionary’s home team.

*50 advocates
x two friends each
committing just \$40/
month
= \$4000 monthly*

These 50 advocates can advocate all at the same time. Imagine a missionary becoming fully supported in just one weekend!

Giving financially unleashes a flood of blessing through you and in you—including the grace to give in other ways.

