

# *Here I Am Lord, Send Me. But Wait... I Have Some Questions.*

## ***"Who came up with this support-raising idea?"***

Nearly 3,300 years ago, God designed a comprehensive financial plan that would adequately provide the salaries and benefits of His full-time workers. In the book of Numbers, God called the Levites to be His first full-time ministers. There were plenty of qualified and motivated laymen (i.e. Moses, Joshua, Caleb) to work in the tabernacle, but God was looking for more than part-time help. He wanted to meet the demanding spiritual needs of the nation, but these could not be met by even the most dedicated workers in their spare time alone.

God created a position for vocational ministers in His kingdom, and these first full-time workers, the Levites, were instructed to rely on God for their income and financial stability.

The Lord tells Aaron in Numbers 18:20,21 ". . . I am your portion and your inheritance among the sons of Israel. . . to the sons of Levi, behold, I have given all the tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service which they perform. . ." (See also Deuteronomy 18:1,2.)

The Lord staked His credibility on providing financial security for His servants. While the nation Israel worked the land and faced the financial uncertainties of drought, disease and famine, the Lord promised to provide for the Levites through the tithes and offerings of their countrymen.

In addition, when God set up His employee pay scale, His checking account was not overdrawn (Numbers 18:8-13). He demanded that His workers be well-cared for. The Lord instructed the people to set aside the "most holy gifts" and "the best of the fresh wine and of the grain" for His ministers. The Israelites were charged with the responsibility of providing for the finances of the Levites, and they were to give of their best.

## ***"Didn't God change His missions budget in the New Testament?"***

After Christ came God did establish a new covenant whereby any believer (not just those in the family of Levi) could serve Him in vocational ministry. Jesus, who was a carpenter, could have funded His ministry by building furniture or repairing carts and tables full-time, then teaching and healing during His spare time. But that's not the example He left those He calls to vocational service.

As Jesus went out ministering full-time, He relied on people (i.e. Mary, Martha, Lazarus) who helped ". . . support

Him out of their own means" (Luke 8:3). Jesus had financial supporters.

When Christ commissioned His followers "to every city and place," He gave them the spiritual authority to minister and told them to trust Him for their physical provisions. "Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff; for the worker is worth his keep" (Matthew 10:9,10). They were to accept gifts from others, as Jesus said, "eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages" (Luke 10:4-7). A laborer in God's kingdom is truly worthy of being paid for his service. The workers in the early church lived on the same system of support that God established with the Levites.

## ***"Paul was a tent maker. He didn't ask for gifts. Shouldn't I follow his example?"***

The apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 9:14, "so also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel." He explains that God set up a system of financial support for His workers. He also writes that even though he had the right to be supported by the Corinthians, he chose to make tents. This was an exception, however, to Paul's normal method of ministry.

Paul wanted to make sure that the Corinthians to whom he preached had no reason to question his motives. He chose to live on a smaller salary and take less from the Corinthians in order to validate his character, his faith and his ministry. With the Corinthian church Paul may have supplemented his income by sewing canvas, but he did rely on gifts from supporters.

Many times in the New Testament (Philippians 4:10-16; 2 Corinthians 8:1-5) we see that the churches gave sacrificially to support Paul's work. He commended them for their support and reminded them of the eternal profit of their gifts. "Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account" (Philippians 4:17).

This great missionary willingly received financial support from other Christians and churches, and he asked for support. "When I go to Spain. . . I hope to have you assist me on my journey" (Romans 15:24). The original language in this verse confirms Paul's request for money. John also made reference support: "For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to

support such men, so that we may be fellow workers with the truth" (3 John 7,8).

In examining Scripture it is clear that Paul was a support-raising missionary, and his part-time job in Corinth was a special exception to God's financial plan for His full-time workers. The lifestyle of supported ministry that he was called to was little different than the models followed by both Levites of the Old Testament and Jesus Himself.

***"Is it less spiritual to look for a salaried missionary job rather than a support-raising position?"***

Raising support does not make you holier than other Christians. There is nothing you can do or fail to do that will make you more spiritual or alter your eternal position in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-14, Romans 6:5-9).

Many outstanding denominations and missions groups offer salaries to their missionaries, and the Lord is honoring their ministries. All Christians need to live by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7, Hebrews 11:6) regardless of how they receive their paychecks.

The bottom line is that you need to be willing to do whatever the Lord asks you to do or you won't be qualified for any missionary career (salaried or supported).

***"Can I really live on a missionary's salary?"***

This depends on your definition of "living." If you think you need to make \$100,000 a year, you will probably find the salary a little meager for your lifestyle. However, living on a moderate salary does not mean you have to live like a third-class citizen. In most Christian organizations your income will allow you a sufficient amount to give cheerfully to the Lord's work (2 Corinthians 9:8), as well as adequately meet your daily needs, educate your children and provide for your retirement.

Almost 67 percent of the more than 420 North American Protestant mission organizations require their staff to develop their own financial support. That's more than 67,000 people depending on vocational ministry salaries. In Campus Crusade for Christ, for example, each staff member's salary is evaluated annually in light of the Consumer Price Index and, if necessary, adjusted to the rising cost of living.

In addition to salaries, a number of other expenses may be covered through reimbursements (automobile, insurance and ministry expenses). Plus a group insurance plan provides staff members with full health coverage for personal injuries and sickness; and a life insurance and pension program is designed to meet individual needs and give families a reasonable level of security. It is the philosophy of Campus Crusade in financial matters that a staff member should be free to minister without undue financial pressures.

The steps of good men are directed by the Lord. He delights in each step they take. If they fall it isn't fatal, for the Lord holds them with His hand. I have been young and now I am old. And in all my years I have never seen the Lord forsake a man who loves Him, nor have I seen the children of the godly go hungry. Instead, the godly are able to be generous with their gifts and loans to others, and their children are a blessing" (Psalm 37:23-26, Living Bible).

***"I'm willing to do what God wants, but right now I just don't feel comfortable raising support."***

Most people find themselves a little uneasy as they approach the challenge of support-raising. It seems to go against our American culture to depend on others...especially for finances.

As Christians we heed strong scriptural warnings about our culture's view of morality, materialism, etc. Similarly, we should not rely on the world's view of our own feelings when it comes to God's Word on support for His full-time ministers. The Bible strongly states that accepting support gifts is part of God's economy.

Raising support is a matter of obedience, not feelings. If God calls you to a supported ministry position, then He will provide everything you need to fulfill your ministry (including emotional strength and perseverance). ". . . my God shall supply all your needs" (Philippians 4:19), and "Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass" (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

Developing a financial support team is a great faith adventure and a tremendous opportunity to see God work in your life as well as in the lives of the people who will stand with you through their prayers and financial gifts. When you look at the benefits of support-raising; a stronger faith, opportunities to introduce others to Christ, a solid base of prayer for your ministry and a network of new friendships, the fears and obstacles dim in comparison.

You must choose to remember God's promise to meet your needs and to bless those who give. The phrase "it is more blessed to give than to receive" is not just a platitude on Sunday school walls, but the conviction of our Lord Jesus (Acts 20:35). God honors giving and promises to return His blessings a hundred-fold. In Malachi 3:10-12 God commands, ". . . test Me now in this, . . . if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until there is no more need." Your supporters are not merely doing you a favor, but you are helping them make investments for which God will return benefits to them now and throughout eternity.

For further study and consideration: Numbers 1:47-54; Numbers 18; Deuteronomy 18:1-6; Luke 8:1-3; 1 Corinthians 9; Matthew 16:25; Luke 6:38; Jeremiah 29:11; John 15:16.

*In response to commonly asked questions, Roger Randall has written a series of articles about full-time vocational ministry. Roger, who has served on the staff of Campus Crusade for Christ for 25 years, has counseled thousands of university students and young professionals regarding their career decisions.*

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