

Seven Funding Structures For Kingdom Work

by John Edmiston

In missions circles there is considerable debate surrounding how funds should be raised and apportioned for Kingdom work. This article looks first of all at the larger picture of the seven main ways money was used by God's people in the Bible and then goes on to examine how money should be used in the context of the global Christian movement.

Some themes that emerge include the following:

- a) Funding is part of the process of forming Kingdom community through mutual giving and receiving and is meant to reflect Christian interdependence.
- b) Funding is never an end in itself but always supports a greater work of God.
- c) Funding is never a reason for doing something. God's will is prior. We must first find out what God wants then seek the funding for it, not just do it because the funds are available.
- d) Each type of Kingdom work has an appropriate way that it should be supported. No one method of funding works in all situations.
- e) Unethical methods of funding can have a serious negative impact upon the ministry.

Part 1 – Biblical Foundations, The Seven Funding Structures For Kingdom Work

1. Grants to support large capital projects e.g. building the tabernacle. (Exodus 25:1-8)

Project funding is found through Scripture (Exodus 25:1-8, 1 Chronicles 22:14-19, 2 Kings 12:2-16, Haggai 1:3-8) and even includes government grants such as the support of Ataxerxes for rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:8) and Cyrus (Ezra 1:1-11) and later Darius (Ezra 6:1-12) for the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Project funding is always used to fund large capital works with a definite starting point and ending point. In many cases there are multiple donors such as the people bringing their silver and gold. In some cases there is a large single donor such as King David or Cyrus.

Project funding is appropriate for the building of churches, school and hospitals and for development work that has a definite closure to it.

2. Regular proportional or grace giving to support those who faithfully teach the Word of God

The principle is that the laborer is worthy of his hire (Matthew 10:10, Luke 10:7, 1 Timothy 5:18), and of reaping reward (1 Corinthians 9:11, 2 Timothy 2:6) those who receive spiritual things should return the favor with material things (Romans 15:27, 1 Corinthians 9:11) and that those who preach the gospel should earn their living from the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:3-14).

The Levites were supported by the tithe (Numbers 18:21-32, Hebrews 7:5) and the elders and teachers of the early church were to be supported by their congregations. (Galatians 6:6, 1 Corinthians 9:3-14, 1 Timothy 5:17,18)

Pastors and teachers should receive a salary from those they regularly minister to and are worthy of "double honor" in this regard. This should be the normal means of supporting Christian workers.

3. Church and individual based team support (“missionary support”) for missionary work “to the Gentiles”

Paul did not burden his new Gentile congregations with the requirement of paying him a salary in order that the gospel not be hindered (1 Thessalonians 2:9, 2 Corinthians 11:7-9, 12:13-16) and apparently this became the practice for those going into new Gentile areas so local churches were required to support such men (3 John 1:5-8, 2 Corinthians 11:7-9, Philippians 4:15-19). Even Jesus was supported by some wealthy believers in His itinerant ministry (Luke 8:1-3).

Team support is appropriate when the ministry is itinerant in nature such as Jesus and His disciples or Paul's ministry amidst the Gentiles. Or if it is in a new “unreached” area that does not have a tradition of giving and where asking for funds would be a stumbling block or a burden, and the gospel must be offered without charge. 3 John makes it clear that such workers were worthy of hospitality and of being sent on their way in a fitting manner “*whom you will do well to send forward worthily of God;*”.

Therefore missionaries and church-planters should be supported by sending and partnering churches and by generous individuals.

4. Tentmaking and Kingdom business to support missionaries and church-planting pastors where team-support is unavailable

When team-support is unavailable then the missionaries and bi-vocational church-planting pastors “work with their own hands”. This is often called tent-making after the trade of Paul and Apollos (Acts 18:1-3). While working with one's hands to supply one's daily bread is commended (1 Thessalonians 4:11, 2 Thessalonians 3:7-12, Ephesians 4:28) it is not God's normal way for His workers to be supported (1 Corinthians 9:14), nor was Jesus supported this way (Luke 8:1-3), it is an emergency measure that may distract the worker from the ministry of the Word and prayer (Acts 6:1-4) and it is preferred that Christian workers be focused on their work: **Acts 6:4 MKJV** *But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.* As the Gentile church matured Paul seems to have moved away from tent-making and gone over entirely to team support, this may also have to do with his aging process.

Many missionaries who wish to avoid fundraising, think of tent-making as a better solution. But team support has the advantages of having friends and prayer partners behind one in the work and frees the worker to concentrate on their spiritual tasks for which God has called them (2 Timothy 2:4). Paul boasts of his tent-making (2 Thessalonians 3:7-9) and his not burdening the new churches (1 Thessalonians 2:9, 2 Corinthians 11:7-9, 12:13-16) but Paul never imposes that lifestyle on Timothy or any of his disciples. Instead Paul strongly teaches that Christian workers should “not be muzzled” in collecting a salary from those they help (1 Corinthians 9:9, 1 Timothy 5:18).

Tent-making is a useful approach when other funding means are not available or where team support may be misunderstood, but is perhaps best seen as a biblical backstop rather than as a permanent lifestyle.

5. Sharing within the local church to meet the needs of the poor in the congregation

There is a clear N.T. imperative to meet the needs of the poor especially widows and those Christian poor who were in the same fellowship (Acts 2:44,45; 4:34-37, 6:1-5, 1 Timothy 5:3-16, James 1:27, 1 John 3:16,17) so that there might be equality in the body of Christ (2 Corinthians 8:14) and so that there be no one needy among them (Acts 4:34). Indeed refusing to help someone close to you who was in clear economic need was seen as a severe violation of the faith (James 2:14-16, 1 John 3:16,17, 1 Timothy 5:8).

These injunctions take on special meaning in developing nations where economic needs are acute and where Christians there may need to depend on one another just to survive. Even in Western nations with good social security there may be people we need to help out of Christian love. Even so we can set reasonable conditions such as Paul does in his instructions to Timothy concerning giving to widows in 1 Timothy chapter 5. Where possible individual Christians should work and be self-sustaining and not depend on others (1 Thessalonians 4:11, 2 Thessalonians 3:7-12, Ephesians 4:28). However the truly needy among them such as widows and orphans in their distress were to be cared for by other believers (James 1:27).

Personal charity is for meeting personal needs especially within the family and the local congregation and is an expected part of the Christian lifestyle. However it can be exploited and so rules may be set so as to ensure that dependency does not result.

6. Sharing with other churches in need both locally and overseas as a form of aid and relief work in times of famine or natural disaster.

A special case of being needy is a natural disaster such as a dire famine and then churches should send aid to the Christians who are in such need (Acts 11:28-30, 2 Corinthians 8:1-16, Romans 15: 25-27) and such funds should be carefully managed and delivered by trustworthy people such as Barnabas Paul and Titus (see above verses). Paul sees this kind of charity as being especially glorifying to God, and the sort that He will reward:

2 Corinthians 9:10-15 MKJV (10) Now He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for eating, may He supply and multiply your seed, and increase the fruits of your righteousness (11) you being enriched in everything to all generosity, which works out thanksgiving to God through us. (12) For the ministry of this service not only supplies the things lacking of the saints, but also multiplying through many thanksgivings to God, (13) through the proof of this ministry they glorify God for your freely expressed submission to the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of the fellowship toward them and toward all, (14) and in their prayer for you, who long after you, because of the exceeding grace of God on you. (15) Thanks be to God for His unspeakable free gift.

Christian aid to other churches during times of natural disaster should be well organized and carefully managed, yet is fundamentally a generous outpouring of love that brings great glory to God.

7. Almsgiving to meet the needs of the poor as found in society in general.

Almsgiving was a part of Jewish life and was part of the teaching and lifestyle of Jesus (Matthew 5:42, 6:1-4, 10:8, Luke 11:41, 12:33) and Dorcas (Acts 9:36) and Cornelius (Acts 10:2-4) were recognized as outstanding in this regard. This led to a miracle for Dorcas (Acts 9:36-42) and to Cornelius' prayers being heard by God (Acts 10:31). Peter and John transcended almsgiving with physical healing in Acts 3:1-6 with the lame man at the Gate Beautiful. Part of the lesson of that particular miracle is that almsgiving is good, but making people whole and capable of earning their own living is even better. Paul saw his great famine relief gift as "offering alms to my nation" (Acts 24:17).

The ethos here is "freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:7) and "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). Almsgiving is to be done spontaneously, generously, quietly and unconsciously (Matthew 6:1-4) and freely and without compulsion (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Almsgiving is a blessed spontaneous gift to those in need in the general society.

Part Two: Application Of The Seven Funding Structures To Missionary Work

The missionary task consists of a complex interweaving of missions agencies, local fellowships, acts of compassion, major projects, itinerant and established works and so on and so forth. Thus we need to understand and utilize the appropriate funding strategy for each part of God's work.

1. **Grants / Project Funding:** Is best utilized for capital works such as building churches, schools and hospitals and for projects that have a definite start and finish date such as a large local evangelistic outreach. Project funding should not be used for ongoing support of Christian workers and they should not have to be writing grants in order to fund their wages. If this happens the workers lose their ability to respond to the Holy Spirit and instead just do those things that can get grant funding.
Project funding should follow God's prior leading and design, not the other way around. For instance God first gave the design of the tabernacle to Moses while he was on the mountain (Exodus 25:40), then after his return to the camp the people gave the funding required to build it (Exodus 25:1-8), thus the project did not follow the funders control but was led by God Himself. Government grants were accepted if they facilitated something that God had in mind already such as rebuilding Jerusalem or the Temple. Grants should only be applied for after God has given the clear leading and vision for a particular project.
2. **Regular proportional or grace giving** should be the normal means of support of pastors and Christian workers. Churches should support those who minister the word of God to them and should not withhold the wages due to the worker. Churches planted by missionaries should be self-supporting right from the start and not dependent on injections of funds from overseas. Giving should be taught in all churches, not as a legalism or as a bondage, but as a proper gracious Christian response to being taught spiritual things.

The Christian worker should not have to beg for money but should be given "double honor" in the eyes of the congregation. Small congregations may have worker pastors but this should not be seen as having a "free" pastor and the church should not take this for granted. They should aim to grow and to be able to fully support their pastor through their own generous giving for the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should get their living from the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:3-14).

There is a bad habit on many mission fields of "free" service by missionaries who pastor churches or lecture in seminaries. This entrenches the "something for nothing" mentality, creates dependency and prevents the recruiting of national pastors and theologians who would require a salary and thus "strain the budget". If a missionary pastors a church he or she should be given a proper local salary by the church and similarly if they serve in a bible college. This teaches proper principles of giving and also make it possible for the missionary to go home or move on as a national can then be paid to take her place.

3. **Team Support** is appropriate when there is no local fellowship of believers that can support the Christian worker, for instance when a missionary is sent to an unreached people group and does not want to "charge for the gospel". Team support is also very useful when missionaries need to go into areas where the gospel has not penetrated at any depth or where the church is very immature. Paul, Jesus and the traveling missionaries "strangers" of 3 John were supported in this way. It is also useful for supporting an itinerant ministry that is not attached to or supported by any particular local fellowship. In fact this seems to be its main application in the New Testament.

However team support should not relieve the local church of the responsibility of supporting their pastor or the seminary of the responsibility of supporting its bible teachers. Paul criticized the Corinthian church saying that he “robbed other churches” in order to be able to minister to them (2 Corinthians 11:8), when in fact they should have been supporting him themselves (1 Corinthians 9:11)!

If a Christian worker on team support ministers to a church for free, this should not be seen as “normal” (1 Corinthians 9 – whole chapter) or as giving the church a free pass on supporting those who minister to it (1 Corinthians 9:14).

Team support creates intense personal bonds between missionaries and supporters. The missionary can call out to them for prayer and for the material needs of the work (Philippians 4:10-19).

However over time, the missionary should mainly relate to the community on the mission field rather than the community “back home”. I have been quite disturbed by a popular book on fundraising that starts with an example of a missionary spending eighteen hours a week writing letters to supporters back home! This places the mind of the missionary in entirely the wrong place! It should be focused on incarnating into the local community instead!

Christianity is very much about becoming part of a community of love and if there is a local church, then the missionary should live at the level of the local believers and “eat whatever is set before him” (Luke 10:1-9) and be supported by them in Christian giving and receiving. If the desired lifestyle of the missionary is much higher than can be supported by the local believers then this should be reviewed and every effort should be made to find a national worker who can live at the local salary level and who can be quickly trained to replace the missionary in that context.

4. **Tent-making and Kingdom Business** – is useful when there is a) no established local fellowship of believers or b) when team support has failed to materialize for some reason or c) when a secular profession is needed to enter a creative access nation (visas did not exist in NT times!). I have been a tent-maker now and then and can say that it is a useful but very stressful strategy as one has to combine both ministry tasks with making a living. Unnecessary distraction in the ministry is to be avoided (Acts 6:4, 2 Timothy 2:4) and so tent-making is generally a strategy of last resort. In my experience only missionaries with extraordinarily high levels of natural energy can make a success of it.

However there is one application of tent-making that is quite useful - and that is in equipping an indigenous Christian ministry with a small business that involved people-contact, as a platform for entering the target community. Indigenous missionaries are frequently chronically under-supported by their local church and really need additional income. Also a small business can help them to become known and validates them in the area they are trying to reach. This may be a health clinic, Internet cafe, water purification and bottling, or even a center that teaches English as a second language.

C.K. Prahalad in his ground-breaking book *The Fortune At The Bottom Of The Pyramid* has identified business strategies that work among the world's poor communities and may be of great help in developing micro-franchises and other ways of supporting indigenous Christian missionaries.

5. **Sharing within the local church** is the appropriate way for poverty to be relieved within the Christian community. Christians should be taught to share with one another from the outset and local churches should have programs to help the indigent poor among them and not rely

on external funding, or on the government or NGOs though these means may be helpful at certain times (e.g. during famine). Missionaries should help each other out, and local Christians should help each other out, and folks "back home" should help each other out – so that there may be equality in the body of Christ (2 Corinthians 8:14).

Christians should be strongly taught that selfish materialism is a fundamental sin against the love of God (1 John 3:16,17) and the rich among them should be taught to do good and to share.

1 Timothy 6:17-19 MKJV *Charge the rich in this world that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, He offering to us richly all things to enjoy, (18) that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to share, to be generous, (19) laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.*

This jars with many who value Western individualism and personal prosperity ahead of the prosperity of the Christian community as a whole. We need to rethink our values in this area. But this is not the same as advocating Communism! Private enterprise is still commended in Scripture (especially in Proverbs & Ecclesiastes) and there is no suggestion that the poor are "entitled" to handouts. Rather, they should work with their hands to support themselves where possible (1 Thessalonians 4:11, 2 Thessalonians 3:7-12, Ephesians 4:28).

6. **Sharing with other churches** can be a wonderful expression of Christ's love and is especially appropriate for those afflicted by circumstances over which they have little or no control such as persecution, war, famine, and natural disasters. Paul's collection from the Gentiles, for the poverty stricken saints in Jerusalem, is the major NT example of this. The whole idea of this gift was to build unity and equality right across the entire body of Christ (2 Corinthians 9:14).

Some examples of this are when rich suburban churches share the costs of building an inner city church, or when churches help a drought-stricken parish, or when a pastor in a very small rural parish is subsidized by the denomination as a whole. This knits the body of Christ together in a community of giving and receiving.

This can also be extended to overseas aid for the persecuted church or for churches that are in regions affected by natural disasters. For instance our small mission recently helped a seminary overseas that was affected by a major earthquake which demolished some of their facilities. This is an entirely appropriate form of giving. Paul was very careful about his administration of the gift. We should be especially wise in how we go about such donations because they may involve very large sums of money, which can be a real temptation. However this should not deter our generosity.

7. **Almsgiving** – is one of the thorniest issues on the mission field and the question of "how do we handle beggars and those who ask us for money" is one of the most immediate issues new missionaries face in many developing nations. The NT seems to indicate on one hand that almsgiving is a sign of a soft and godly heart. On the other hand, it does not set rules and regulations about it but seems to leave it up to the leading of the Holy Spirit. The example of Peter and John healing the lame man who was begging for money points to the idea that missionaries should aim to bring gospel wholeness, dignity and independence rather than just handing out cash. Many missionaries feel they are simply viewed as "walking ATM machines" by the poor and that this hinders their ministry. Generally my personal rule is not to give money - except when the Holy Spirit clearly indicates that I should do so - and to do so privately, immediately, and without further thought. I prefer to give people the skills to make a living or as Moses put it "the power to make wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:18).

Unethical Approaches To Funding

For some people the raising of funds “for God's work” has become an end in itself that justifies unethical approaches. Some of these are listed below:

1. *Salesmanship / Long offering speeches etc* – emotional manipulation is never a part of biblical fund-raising, though genuine appeal to conscience is.
2. *Donor cultivation* – We do not see people being flattered in order to give or “friendships” being developed simply for the purpose of fund-raising. Friendship and fellowship was a sacred participation in the body of Christ.
3. *Selling the gospel or charging for the power of God* – This is the sin that Simon Magus was so roundly rebuked for. (Acts 8:9-24)
4. *Charging for masses said for the dead or for indulgences or for the forgiveness of sins.* Salvation is FREE (Romans 5:15-18, 6:23, 11:29, Ephesians 2:8) and raising funds by promising eternal life in return for cash is a complete misrepresentation of the gospel. This sin led directly to the Reformation and Martin Luther's protest against indulgences.
5. *The selling of religious trinkets* – For instance we never see Paul selling “handkerchiefs that can heal the sick” to support his ministry (Acts 19:11,12)
6. *Misrepresentation* – Saying that the funds are being gathered for one purpose (often with high emotional appeal) e.g child support or famine relief when in fact the funds are being used for administration or for another more mundane project.
7. *Preaching that giving / not giving are linked with blessing and cursing so that people are afraid not to give.* Certain ministries teach that God blesses and protects those who tithe and curses those who do not tithe and that the only way to keep your family safe is to give to the church. Whereas the cross has put an end to all curses (Galatians 3:10-14) and we have all the spiritual blessings in the heavenly realms through faith in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:3, Galatians 3:29). While God loves a cheerful giver this does not mean that His blessings are for sale. God looks on the heart not into the wallet.

The effect of such unethical approaches to fund-raising goes right to the core of the gospel. They can give the impression that salvation or blessing is a matter of giving the right donation to the right ministry (perhaps one that has a “100-fold anointing”). In the missionary context this can give rise to a “cargo cult” mentality as these approaches are easily blended with local animistic practices.

God's Faithful Provision

Hudson Taylor used to say that “*God's work, done in God's way, will never lack God's supply*” and Scriptures such as Matthew 6:33 promise that if we seek God's Kingdom and His righteousness “all these things will be added unto us”. This is further reinforced by New Testament teaching in the epistles of 1 and 2 Corinthians and Philippians. God watches over His work to perform it (2 Chronicles 16:9, Philippians 1:6). Thus we do not need to resort to unethical practices and poor theology in order to get the funds that we need.

God funds His divine work, not our human ambitions. There are many unmet needs and the “poor will always be with you” (Matthew 26:11). Sometimes God's work is highly selective, and this can be puzzling. As Jesus said about Elisha's healing of Naaman – there was only one leper healed in all Israel and that was a Syrian!

Luke 4:25-27 MKJV *But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land. (26) But Elijah was not sent to any of them, except to Zarephath, a city of Sidon, to a woman, a widow. (27) And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.*

So we see that God seems only to work on a small subset of the totality of human misery at any one time. The miracles, and the funding are never as large as the humanly perceived need. The job seems to be never done.

Yet much can be done when the power of loving Christian community is unleashed by a move of the Holy Spirit:

Acts 2:42-47 MKJV *And they were continuing steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, and in fellowship and in the breaking of the loaves, and in prayers. (43) And fear came on every soul. And many wonders and miracles took place through the apostles. (44) And all who believed were together and had all things common. (45) And they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, according as anyone had need. (46) And continuing with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they shared food with gladness and simplicity of heart, (47) praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*

All the financial needs of the Jerusalem church were met when Spirit-filled love flowed freely through the fellowship. Worship, faith and reverent obedience unlocked hearts and needs were met by generous giving and the Holy Spirit put an end to all selfish materialism. By implication, it is as we repent of our materialism and return to Christian community, love and grace that God's provision will be unleashed in our midst through the funding structures that we discussed earlier.

Finally we need to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit - we have to ask questions such as: "what is the Lord doing in my day, and in my time, and through my hands" and seek God's guidance - especially before starting out upon projects that may require large amounts of funding. Large building projects, commenced in a moment of folly, have caused untold pain later on. If God leads - then God will provide.

CONCLUSION

Each form of ministry has its own funding structure that is appropriate to it and which works best to the glory of God. We cannot just go with one structure only and say that is the way for all people at all time. Instead we need to select our funding approach to match the needs and circumstances of the ministry.

Missionary societies that work entirely on the team support model may need to consider alternatives such as grant-funding for special projects, tent-making and Kingdom business for their indigenous missionary staff, and in training the churches on the field to support those who minister among them. Having one funding model for everyone involved with the work of the mission may end up being highly inappropriate. As prominent Christian businessman Dennis Bakke often says: "Fairness is treating everyone differently".

Further our funding model should tie us into the body of Christ and involve us in ever deeper relationships of love and reciprocity. We are called to love one another, not to be independent of one another. Independence breeds dependence in the other and creates patronage and pride. By contrast, interdependence, inner spiritual neediness and desire for relationship breeds humility, graciousness and community.

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