

It's Not About the Money

A different look at support discovery

| **by** Jeff Boesel |

Probably the biggest hurdle for anyone considering mission involvement today is the necessity of raising financial support. With the cost of living and ministry increasing financial support minimums of \$4,000 to \$8,000 per month are not uncommon. Add to this the current trend in the U.S. church to funnel its mission funds inward (investing large amounts into short-term projects for its congregation and only supporting longer term missionaries with a strong ties to the church family) and you get the idea that support discovery for the new missionary is an impossible task. Indeed, it is!!

Consider this, however. Our God is the God of the impossible. He has unlimited resources and desires to see the whole of humanity reached with his good news. Couldn't he just speak the word and millions of dollars be available for missions in an instant? Of course he could. He's God and he is in the business of creating something from nothing. Support discovery is not a problem for God. Finding hearts willing to trust him in obedience might be.

We must conclude, then, that God has other reasons, not his ability or willingness, for walking his people through a lengthy support discovery process. Let me suggest the following for your consideration. First, raising financial support develops the faith necessary for the road ahead. Second, delay in the support discovery process might be due to matter of timing and/or direction. Third, financial support discovery can become a tool God uses to bring about necessary spiritual maturity in the life of the new missionary. And fourth, experience gained in the process of raising support is valuable training for future ministry. Allow me to unpack each of these for you.

The cross-cultural missionary walk is one that requires a faith not common to our experience in North America. I am not trying to say that it doesn't exist, but just that most of us do not put ourselves in situations where we are required to trust God for anything in our daily lives. Missionaries, however, must trust that God will provide for them financially every month through his work in the lives of his people, moving them to give. A missionary's ministry and very survival rest squarely on the faithful financial (and prayer) support of partners. This is not a concern of every day but it can be a concern that fills many of them. In addition to finances, just trying to live and minister in another culture requires a greater reliance on God's grace. Cross-cultural living has been described as an annoyance that, though one learns to function within it, never goes away and makes even the simplest of things more difficult. When faced with these pressures, doubts can, and often do, develop. The missionary may question whether they actually made the right decision in going to the mission field. At those times memories of God's miraculous provision in those difficult fund raising months come to mind and it becomes clear that God, not the missionary, brought them to where they are and it rests on him to sustain them. In a sense it is like moving forward by looking back. We gain the courage to move ahead into the future because of God's demonstrated faithfulness in the past.

Since God knows us better than we know ourselves, knows the people we will be in ministry to and with, and knows the best possible time for all that to happen, it makes

sense to trust him with the timing of our departure. One way God has used to work out this perfect timing is through timing the completion of a missionary's funding. It is a simple matter of believing that God knows best. Where we get into trouble is in setting a timetable based on our view of the need and then getting stressed when God doesn't act in accordance with what we have set up. If we can release our desire to control the timing of the project and strive to accept the journey as part of God's plan for us, the path seems easier, even enjoyable.

God may withhold funding because we are on the right road but headed in the wrong direction. When we first began taking steps toward missionary life, we thought God meant for us to serve in Germany. There were several confirmations of our path at the beginning of the process but as we began trying to find financial backing all the seemingly open doors closed. After nine months of hard work we were receiving virtually nothing in financial support. Near the end of this time, the door to Germany closed and an opportunity opened in Guatemala. We cautiously accepted the new direction. Almost immediately God opened the doors of his provision and we were over-funded within a year and on our way.

God often uses a delay in funding to develop our spiritual character in some way. The most obvious area addressed through support discovery is pride vs. humility. For some reason we tend to think that our being fully funded has something to do with us. Nothing could be further from the truth. I remember a missionary family who had been trying to raise support for four years. They expressed frustration that only those missionaries with the best "dog and pony show" received the support they needed. Actually, God's provision has nothing to do with us and everything to do with him. When it all boils down, it is a matter of obedience between God and the donor. As God moves in the donor's heart and the donor responds in obedience, ministry is funded. It's God's show. He will glorify himself through the process. In his grace, he allows us to share in what he is doing.

Finally, we often see financial support discovery in the wrong light, as a necessary evil to be endured in order to enter into ministry some time later. Actually, support discovery is ministry. Through you, God is at work in the lives of his people with whom you are blessed to come into contact. Just as he is at work in you, conforming you to the image of his Son through obedience, he is at work in the lives of those who will support you. He will use you, as you are willing, to speak into their lives. Living life, walking along the path that God has laid out for us, is indeed, ministry. If we can see support discovery in that way it becomes just another step along our life path in which God is both forming us and using us. There is no better preparation for the next step, cross-cultural ministry, when God has completed his work in and through us in this step.

There is no denying that the support discovery process is a difficult one. But I contend, from my own experience and that of others, that it can be a rewarding, and even enjoyable, one as we consider the above ideas and trust in the one who calls us. May God bless you as you strive to follow him in obedience along the path he has laid out for you.