

Partnership Development Bible Study

Perspectives from the Word of God on Partnership Development Issues

by Howard R. Killion, Ph.D.

Following are some Scriptures that will help you think through the partnership development process.

For each of the following passages, ask yourself:

- What does it say?
- What does it mean?
- What does it mean to me?



Make notes to remind yourself of your insights, reactions, and responses to what the Lord is saying to you.

God's Attitude toward Us

1. Genesis 1 and 2 (especially 1:26-2:10, 15-25) show how carefully God created a world in which all of our needs would be met: abundance, variety, beauty, meaningful work, creativity, discipline, personal meaning and significance, companionship, family, and society. He declared that it was "very good" (1:31). God demonstrated His loving generosity and powerful reliability toward us from the very beginning.

Prior to Adam and Eve's disobedience and fall, how did God satisfy their needs?

2. This is the basis for Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount about the generosity and reliability of God on our behalf (Matthew 6:7-11, 25, 32-33).

"When you pray, don't babble on and on as people of other religions do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us today the food we need..." (Matthew 6:7-11).

"That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? ...These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father

already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need” (Matthew 6:25, 32-33).

How do your feelings about partnership development relate to what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount regarding the generosity and reliability of God and our attitude toward Him as provider of our material needs? What about Paul’s teachings in Philippians 4:6-7, 11-13, 19? (See also Hebrews 13:5)

Our Attitude toward God

1. Read Genesis 3:1-13. The sin of Adam and Eve was essentially due to their doubting the generosity and reliability of God in spite of all they had seen and heard.
2. The generosity and reliability of God is the basis of Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount regarding what our attitude should be toward God (Matthew 6:19-34).

“Don’t store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven... Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.... No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink... Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. So don’t worry about tomorrow...” (Matthew 6:19-21, 24-25, 33-34).

Comments and observations:

Our Status in Partnership Development

1. Read Numbers 18:21-24. Unlike all the other tribes of Israel, God did not give the Levites any land as an inheritance. The Levites did not raise food for themselves on the land. Instead, the other Israelites gave their tithes and offerings from the land to God, and He gave these gifts to the Levites as their livelihood. God organized the nation of Israel in this way so that He could set aside (call) the Levites to special religious service, to care for the arrangements needed to enable the Israelites to worship Him. The Levites did not receive their livelihood from their fellow Israelites. Rather, their brothers and sisters gave to God, and GOD gave to the Levites.

“As for the tribe of Levi, your relatives, I will compensate them for their service in the Tabernacle. Instead of an allotment of land, I will give them the tithes from the entire land of Israel.... Only the Levites may serve at the Tabernacle, and they will be held responsible for any offenses against it.... The Levites will receive no allotment of land among the Israelites, because I have given them the Israelites’ tithes, which have been presented as sacred offerings to the Lord...” (Numbers 18:21, 23-24).

Comments and Observations:

2. Paul recognized that his status was similar to the Levites.

- In 1 Corinthians 9, he claims that pastors and evangelists such as himself have the right to receive their livelihood from the gifts of the Lord’s people. It is these gifts that enable pastors and evangelists to devote their time to ministry.

“For the law of Moses says, ‘You must not muzzle an ox to keep it from eating as it treads out the grain. ...it was written for us, so that the one who plows and the one who threshes the grain might both expect a share of the harvest. Since we have planted spiritual seed among you, aren’t we entitled to a harvest of physical food and drink? If you support others who preach to you, shouldn’t we have an even greater right to be supported? ...Don’t you realize that those who work in the temple get their meals from the offerings brought to the temple? And those who serve at the altar get a share of the sacrificial offerings. In the same way, the Lord ordered that those who preach the Good News should be supported by those who benefit from it” (1 Corinthians 9:9-14).

- In Philippians 4:18, Paul makes it clear that there is no “linkage” between the gifts of the Lord’s people to God, and God’s use of those gifts for the livelihood of His specially-called servants like Paul.

“At the moment I have all I need—and more! I am generously supplied with the gifts you sent me with Epaphroditus. They are a sweet-smelling sacrifice that is acceptable and pleasing to God,” Philippians 4:18.

Comments and Observations:

Our Attitude in Partnership Development

1. Read Romans 15:23-27.

Paul was not afraid to ask for support for himself and others (See also 1 Corinthians 16:1-6, 10-11).

“But now I have finished my work in these regions, and after all these long years of waiting, I am eager to visit you. I am planning to go to Spain, and when I do, I will stop off in Rome. And after I have enjoyed your fellowship for a little while, you can provide for my journey. But before I come, I must go to Jerusalem to take a gift to the believers there. For you see, the believers in Macedonia and Achaia have eagerly taken up an offering for the poor among the believers in Jerusalem. They were glad to do this because they feel they owe a real debt to them. Since the Gentiles received the spiritual blessings of the Good News from the believers in Jerusalem, they feel the least they can do in return is to help them financially” (Romans 15:23-27).

2. Paul refrained from asking for support from people if he believed they would not understand. Sometimes he supported himself as a tentmaker, but at times he received support from other churches when ministering.

- The Corinthian church: Acts 18:3; 1 Corinthians 9:12; 2 Corinthians 10:7; 11:7-9; 12:14-18.
- The Thessalonian church: 1 Thessalonians 2:6-9; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13; Philippians 4:16.
- The Ephesian church: Acts 20:33-35.

3. Paul considered partnership development an important means of blessing potential donors.

- 2 Corinthians 8:1-7 invites and encourages donors to receive God’s gift of a generous heart and the opportunity to act upon it (See also Philippians 4:10).

“Now I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters, what God in his kindness has done through the churches in Macedonia. They are being tested by many troubles, and they are very poor. But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity. For I can testify that they gave not only what they could afford, but far more. And they did it of their own free will. They begged us again and again for the privilege of sharing in the gift for the believers in Jerusalem.... So we have urged Titus, who encouraged your giving in the first place, to return to you and encourage you to finish this ministry of giving. Since you excel in so many ways...I want you to excel also in this gracious act of giving” (2 Corinthians 8:1-4, 6-7).

What should be the motivation(s) of believers for giving money and other resources?

What is meant by Paul's phrase "this grace of giving"?

How can you help your potential donors to have this motivation?

- 2 Corinthians 9:5-8 encourages donors to allow the gift of wholehearted generosity to extend into and facilitate many other good works besides financial giving. (Note also that Paul used careful planning in his support-raising.)

"So I thought I should send these brothers ahead of me to make sure the gift you promised is ready. But I want it to be a willing gift, not one given grudgingly. Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. 'For God loves a person who gives cheerfully.' And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others" (2 Corinthians 9:5-8).

- 2 Corinthians 9:10-11 encourages donors regarding the transforming work of the Spirit of Christ through obedience, especially in their attitude of thanksgiving and in their righteousness as a result of their obedience. (See also Philippians 4:17.)

"For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you. Yes, you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will thank God" (2 Corinthians 9:10-11).

Comments and Observations:

- 2 Corinthians 9:12-15 makes the generosity of God more visible, and the Gospel more credible. This encourages believers to praise God, pray for one another (including donors), and practice generosity themselves. This also attracts nonbelievers to God. (See also Hebrews 13:15-16; 1 Peter 2:12.)

What is the “indescribable gift” for which Paul thanks God in the final verse (9:15)?

“So two good things will result from this ministry of giving—the needs of the believers in Jerusalem will be met, and they will joyfully express their thanks to God. As a result of your ministry, they will give glory to God. For your generosity to them and to all believers will prove that you are obedient to the Good News of Christ. And they will pray for you with deep affection because of the overflowing grace God has given to you. Thank God for this gift too wonderful for words,” 2 Corinthians 9:12-15.

Comments and Observations:

4. Read **Philippians 4:18**.

According to Paul, the gifts sent by the Philippian Christians were really given to whom? Then, from whom did Paul actually receive the gifts? How does this arrangement of support for Paul compare with that for the Levites? In what way(s) does this affect your feelings about raising support?

5. Read **Luke 8:1-3**.

How were the material needs of Jesus and His disciples met?

6. **Matthew 10:5-14**

When Jesus sent out the twelve disciples to do ministry, how were their material needs to be met?