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# THE COMMUNION OF GIVING AND RECEIVING

**WHEN MONEY** “goes on mission,” it travels in the form of financial gifts, carried along in the pockets of those who spend it on the ordinary things of life and ministry, so they can do the extraordinary things God has called them to do. What follows is a story of one of these extraordinary things. It is a real-life parable about an American, a Romanian, an Egyptian, and an old pair of gym socks.

Daniel<sup>1</sup> was a young man on the rise when he became the children’s pastor of a church in California. What he didn’t know was that his position would eventually lead him to accept God’s call to become a paradigm buster in Poland as the country emerged from the shadow of Soviet domination. Daniel is an explorer, a man full of faith and curiosity. His questions often lead him into uncharted territory; and occasionally, his prodding introduces him to useful, paradigm-shifting ideas.

In Poland, he landed on a big one. He realized the Polish church leaders he was working with to establish an early childhood Christian education program were not only his heroes for how they had endured and even flourished under the iron grip of communism, they were as capable as he was to lead the national mission he had founded. What they needed was for Daniel to

show them how to run the ministry and to help them take full ownership.

They decided they would divide responsibilities. Daniel would manage the ministry until it reached its potential, and he would raise the money back home to help the Polish leaders develop and expand the work as it grew. This created a problem. The work grew—and outgrew Daniel’s ability to raise sufficient funds.

The pressure ramped up when a Romanian leader asked Daniel to help him establish a similar work in his country. Daniel scratched up the funds to help the Romanian leader start up the ministry following the same model they used in Poland. It wasn’t long before church leaders from other countries requested Daniel to help them as well. It was hard and slow work to expand into a new country. The launch of each new ministry required establishing a publishing house for their materials, setting up training programs for educators, and creating demanding communication and marketing strategies. Besides the hard work, it also took a lot of money.

To finance the work, Daniel traveled back and forth to California, where he, his key supporters, and board members organized a series of fundraising events, including successful charity golf tournaments and blind auctions.

The joint events featured sponsorships from local businesses and friends of the ministry who provided generous donations—excursions, stays in vacation villas, home decorating items, spa treatments, objects of art, and even a luxury automobile if someone could sink a hole in one. This raised a lot of money, but the

ministries in Europe continued to grow and outpaced even these new funding initiatives.

The blind auctions, however, set Daniel and the ministry on a whole new unintended path of fundraising. The impact of the success of his fundraising ideas raised a question in Daniel's mind. How could he grow the work in Christ's way, since Christ Himself had seemingly blessed the ministries in Europe? He sought a better way, just as he had when he gave authority of the work in Poland to the leaders he had mentored.

He did not go down the natural path of most Western fundraisers, doing more fundraising himself. After prayer and seeking counsel, Daniel decided to go down the "radical" path of encouraging the Romanian and Polish leaders to raise money in their own settings. They already had taken responsibility for the work in their countries. Now they needed to complete the transition and take responsibility for their own fundraising.

Then Daniel had a new idea. He began to only offer challenge grants; that is, matching funds. For every dollar he raised for them, he wanted these leaders to raise a dollar locally.

Daniel feared creating a paternalistic over dog/underdog approach in this new funding relationship, and, despite their raw recruit status, Daniel always treated his partner ministry leaders as equals. His job was just to show them how he did it. He invited the leader of the Romanian expansion to attend one of the golf tournaments and blind auction fundraisers in California.

The leader completely embraced the idea of taking over fundraising efforts, and to Daniel's surprise, he decided to set up his own blind auction in Romania to see if it would prime the pump

of local giving. Just like Daniel, the leader went to his friends in the local churches and asked them to donate items for their first ever blind auction.

A dear soul in the community enthusiastically gave all he could, literally—an old pair of gym socks, washed, folded neatly, and priced at two leu, or fifty cents. With this widow’s-mite gift, he sparked a revolution.

Before long, the idea of local funding for early childhood education ministry was embraced wholeheartedly by the Romanian Christian community. In short order, within the Romanian context, they were raising significant amounts of money in a manner that had not been done before. And though independent, they still were in deep covenant fellowship with Daniel and other national ministries that were emerging. Each of these ministries was facing a similar challenge to take responsibility for their own governance and funding while still maintaining that same fellowship with Daniel. They entered into a relationship that was not hierarchical but was simply a community of trust and accountability to a set of values, principles, and a mutual purpose.

Next, the Romanian leader, though only barely able to cover the core expenses of his own work, decided he would do for someone else what Daniel had done for him. That is, he would join in the joy of helping the global expansion of the ministry by sending encouragement in the form of a financial love gift to an Egyptian leader who, like he had been a few years earlier, was beginning to plant a new work in Egypt.

Daniel shifted focus from himself and what he could do to a focus on the mission and what these indigenous leaders could achieve independently, and in doing so, birthed a new paradigm

out of the old, unlocking the local resources of the Poles, Romanians, and Egyptians.

In general, money passing from one person to another is a transaction, nothing more than an exchange of something of value for something of value in return. However, unlike everyday financial transactions, when ministries fundraise and Christians give for the mission of sharing Christ, the true value is eternal, not temporal. The gift is given to encourage a transformative act, a loving action of the gospel, where good gets down to work at the very furthest extension of mission, darkness is penetrated, and those around the world created in His image are delivered from deprivation, injustice, loneliness, and the grip of Satan.

At its best, when money goes on mission, it not only supports the transformative work among those being served, it also creates a communion of giving and receiving among givers, mission leadership, and “missional entrepreneurs” from around the world—just as Daniel, the ministry leaders from Poland and Romania, and their international and local donors experienced. Though the Lord is always faithful, this communion is fragile, fraught as much with potential misunderstanding as it is bright with promise. In the past few decades, Western givers and receivers have faced significant changes regarding the getting, giving, and accounting for money in missions as the predictable world of mission finance became disrupted by the explosive growth of the church in the majority, non-Western, world.

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This swell of majority-world Christians and the missional entrepreneurs among them need to acquire the funding and gain the organizational skills to assume full—and equal—partnership with their non-indigenous brother and sister missions. They need funders and mission leaders—both in the West and locally—to partner with them, to support their desire to take responsibility for their ministries, and to help them establish best biblical practices within their own contexts. This shift—away from the way mission funding had been carried out over the past two hundred years—involves the encouragement of local funding and leadership development. This new paradigm of mission finance brings the whole of the missions community and those interested in knowing more about successful mission into alignment with what God is doing today.

Also, in this new paradigm, givers in partnership with ministries want to be more involved in their giving than taking part in a mere transaction; they want to be connected to the purpose of the ministry. Givers do not want to be objectified and thought of as nothing more than the wallet of the bride of Christ. Henri Nouwen wrote: “When we ask people for money to strengthen or expand the work of the Kingdom, we are also inviting them into a new spiritual communion.”<sup>2</sup> And since inviting a proposal from a ministry is the other side of asking for money, a giver who does this is entering into this new shared community.

A friend described it as “a new community of believers that’s bigger than ethnicity, bigger than our passport countries, bigger than our education, bigger than the amounts of money we have or are perceived to have or not have.” He added: “In this new community, we believe the *fruit* of wise stewardship is *joy*.”<sup>3</sup>

Within this communion, the language of have and have not—along with its categorical mindset and practices—is wholly inappropriate to how we relate to each other. In a dysfunctional model of giving, the “poor” receive a trickle-down of resources from the perceived “wealthy.” However, when a communion of giving and receiving exists, there are no artificial limits on what can be accomplished, experienced, or exchanged. There can be abundance and scarcity of what is needed for the harvest within all parts of a missional effort. One might involve prayer warriors organized around the world who can be mobilized on short notice, while another raises funds for needed tools and another funds the expertise to use the tools. Each needs the other—and many others as well. We are, after all, engaged in a common task with a common outcome as our goal.

While inviting first-century believers to share in such a communion, the apostle Paul wrote: “At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, as it is written: ‘The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little’” (2 Cor. 8:14–15).

Today, we need a new paradigm of involvement to achieve this communion. This paradigm will equip us to better respond to the wave of majority-world people coming to Christ.

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## THE WAVE

Body surfing in the Pacific Ocean, bobbing like a cork just beyond foam, you count the waves and wait for the next big swell. You don't think much about the physical forces propelling you forward; you just hope for the ride of your life, and that one more time you can escape being tossed helplessly toward the unforgiving sandy bottom. The trick to getting it right is to be positioned just below the wave's crest, otherwise the wave washes over you. You not only miss the ride, you just mark time in the swells. Get it wrong, and you'll be flung like dirty laundry in a washing machine.

When getting involved with missions, as someone who prays, sends, strategizes, preaches about, invests, fundraises, organizes, tithes, sponsors a child, goes on short-term outreach, volunteers, or simply likes to be thrilled at what God is up to around the world, the swell of our lifetime is here, the wave is cresting, the Son is shining, the water is wonderful.

For the past 2,000 years, these swells have been rolling along. Today, the swell is the combined force of the explosive growth of the church of the majority world. "In 1960, Evangelicals numbered just under 90 million, and by 2010 that had reached close to 600 million."<sup>4</sup> By 2020, two-thirds of Christians will reside in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.<sup>5</sup>

This swell has been generated and has expanded because of the countless number of missionaries and mission organizations that have journeyed to the four points of the compass to preach the good news and do good works. It is also accredited to believers who have joyfully prayed, commissioned, and faithfully

given money to support the work of those who have been in the fields harvesting.

Near the beginning of the twenty-first century, historian Philip Jenkins skillfully described this new wave in his book, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. He asserted that we're living through one of the greatest transformations in the history of religion worldwide. Over the previous century, he noted, Christianity had enjoyed explosive growth in the majority world—in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. He contended that within a few decades, Christianity would be overwhelmingly a non-European, nonwhite religion. We would see no less than the creation of a new Christendom.<sup>6</sup>

Within this swell, missional entrepreneurs from all of the pioneer mission fields are now busy working to create the next swell. We can call them *autochthonous* leaders. I've used words like *indigenous* or *national* to describe these men and women in local mission leadership, but these words are imprecise and can be potentially misleading. So here I'll primarily use *autochthonous*, which can be taken to mean "native to the land." It's a word that hardly rolls off the tongue, but as we go forward, it will help us distinguish between missional investors (givers) from the West and these emerging missional entrepreneurs who seek partnerships for growing their ministries.

Missional entrepreneurs, like most entrepreneurs, are born risk-takers. Risk-taking is in the very nature of their calling, if for no other reason than they are attempting, by definition, something untried and unproven. In the past, the money needed for missions often came from the West. To seek funds locally meant starting two new and untried initiatives at the same time. Not

only would the ministry be fundraising where fundraising hadn't been done before, leaders would be doing so while taking on the task of starting a new work from scratch in a potentially difficult environment—perhaps poor, persecuted, or hostile to Christian evangelization. Embedded in risk is the promise of success and its attendant reward. But it wouldn't be true risk if it didn't invite an equal opportunity for dejection and failure.

### **Getting Started**

Michael, an autochthonous leader, is one such risk-taker. He lives and ministers in a dynamic West African nation, beset by extremists. Formerly the seat of a trading empire known for its mathematics, astronomy, literature, and art, the country is mostly Islamic. Only about two percent of its people identify as Christian. Michael is a man on a mission to change that.

Michael wouldn't call himself a leader. He used to own a shop, and he's active in his church and in his local community. A few years ago, he began talking to friends and some of his contacts at neighboring churches, inviting them to plan a sports outreach to young athletes in his city. They began by organizing an informal sports academy, styled after ones they'd learned about in other African settings. It didn't take long before they had a popular ministry demanding more of their volunteer time.

At this point, they came to a fork in the road all missional entrepreneurs face if their work gains some measure of traction and impact. Michael and his team of volunteers were overwhelmed by the demand of the ministry's work. They faced a decision. They could dial it back to be more manageable, or they could organize more formally and grow the ministry. Either decision,

in my experience, can be led of God. To grow isn't always necessarily the right thing to do. When seen from the individual beneficiary's point of view, a small, under-funded ministry can be as powerful in impact as a large, well-funded ministry. Size isn't the determiner, faithfulness is. If God leads your ministry to grow, challenges associated with creating an institution are unavoidable. This will involve fundraising, developing a board of directors, acquiring employees, and perhaps even interacting with government agencies.

Michael is sorting through each issue and measuring the risks and rewards with the same pursuit of excellence needed for his business, which produced the income necessary to sustain his family. Nothing less is required of him if he wants to see the survival of the new family of God his ministry is producing. Michael is trusting God for ministry results. He's serving with excellence, and he has faith that God will work through his ministry.

Michael is also taking on a slew of unfamiliar tasks: developing a local board, creating connections to other local congregations, pursuing mission funds in his local setting to supplant the money he was receiving from the West and from his business, and *he is praying*. Progress was slow initially, but his efforts are gaining traction as the Christians in his city learn of a tangible way of expressing their faith to see the gospel spread in their own setting.

However, Michael almost had to stop the work when the local economy experienced a downturn that forced him to close his shop and take a job teaching at the local university as he sought new avenues of funds to keep up with the demand for ministry expansion and his current operations.

After some coaching about the promise of local funding,

rather than try to squeeze additional funds from his few Western friends, he took the plunge. Like the headwaters of a great river, the flow began with a trickle, but now, a number of his watershed rivulets are beginning to form a stream. He is raising local funds for his ministry.

Another risk inherent to many ministries in the majority world involves hostility toward Christians. Michael's work induced risk to the local individuals and churches who were joining him with their time, talent, and money—in a setting of sectarian violence and persecution, they were inviting attention, not only from those who don't want to see the gospel preached, but also from Satan himself. If the ministry is at all successful, Michael and his friends will be snatching souls from Satan's grasp. Yet Michael and his coworkers go right on risking everything in pursuit of their calling. This is real courage and leadership, and his local community of Christians is responding with donations to the vision Michael has cast. For many, it's the first time they've given to missions. Like Michael, they are catching the crest of the wave. They are practicing ownership and engagement and as a result, they are experiencing the communion of giving and receiving.

And like all of us stroking toward the crest of the wave, when we catch it, it is the ride of our life. If we miss the ride because we are temporarily paralyzed by the unfamiliarity of the experience, "no worries," as the saying goes—trying something for the first time is always challenging. You just do what you always do when a new challenge promises great reward: you pick yourself up and try again.

## A NEW PARADIGM OF INVOLVEMENT

Michael and thousands like him are the men and women who are awakening to God's call to leadership and to meeting the challenges of sharing the gospel in their own contexts. Like every missional leader for the past two millennia, they are saying, "God has shown us we've got to do something about the least, the last, and the lost," and they are responding to His call by saying, "Yes, Lord."

Like Michael, at some point these autochthonous missional entrepreneurs need givers, volunteers, prayer partners, and possibly staff to join them in their kingdom journey. This seems like pretty standard stuff—it isn't, not even close. The first and foremost reason is the question of money. Where is it? How do they get it? And, in the getting of it, how do they keep their souls and callings safely tucked in God's bosom and His promise of provision? Money is just money, but everything about it as it relates to mission is in flux. For those of us in the West who want to take part in what the Holy Spirit is doing in the majority world, the wave (the tremendous growth of new Christians) calls for a radically new paradigm of involvement—one that disrupts the way we typically think about, work with, and fund missions.

As previously mentioned, this new paradigm involves the ownership and engagement of autochthonous leaders. It is a shift from the operating dynamics of three earlier paradigms of

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evangelical mission funding, during the eras of Presence, Activity, and Outcomes. Each of these paradigms was reflective of the giving and receiving dynamics of its time and rose to meet the challenges of its generation. And each of the succeeding eras has incorporated the aspects of the previous era into its own.

### **The Era of Presence**

In the nineteenth century, out of revival fervor, evangelical missionaries such as Hudson Taylor and Adoniram Judson were overseas with little more than the prayers of their supporters, along with a theological education and the hope that they would preach the gospel to ears that hadn't yet heard it. They often went to outposts of Western trading companies and businesses and established a base of operations from which they began to do missional activities. They subsisted on their meager savings, their gardens, the hoped-for goodwill of the local merchant community and fellow foreigners, and—most importantly—their faith that God would provide.

Their sending communities saw them as doing God's work overseas, present in the harvest field of the Lord. Communication was limited. Years could pass before the story of their work and what God was doing through them became available to the wider church in the West. Simply, their churches knew them to be "over there." This was *presence*, and it has always been a compelling aspect of mission fundraising. Even today, most Westerners find that raising support for mission work in their homeland, when not going out to a new field, is much harder because there isn't a "go into the world" apparent in their calling.

In those early days of nearly impossible travel and scarce

communication, some of these early mission pioneers ran small enterprises, worked in the local churches serving Western merchants, or took odd jobs to augment their support while they established their outreach. Many suffered incredible deprivation in the cause of the gospel. Yet they prevailed. Many churches they established celebrate their legacy today. So do the missions, schools, and hospitals they established.

Their impact continues in the wide array of justice issues they brought to light when challenging the powers of darkness they encountered. Like many Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant missionaries who went to unreached peoples and locales before them, the early evangelical missionaries were a living extension of the ministry Jesus began with this announcement: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18–19).

### **The Era of Activity**

In the later years of the nineteenth century, as the wider church embraced these mission accomplishments and travel and communication became easier, a second paradigm of donor and receiver engagement emerged: the Era of *Activity*.

For supporters, easier communication and updates from the field helped bring missions into focus for givers. Missionaries were finally able to communicate about their activities overseas, which encouraged more giving and became a critical element in the fundraising of the day. Activity simply answers the question,

“How is God using you?” The stories of striving to understand the culture and language, translating Scripture, instituting programs—from schools and hospitals to businesses and social justice efforts—and most importantly, sharing the gospel and how people responded, inspired whole new generations to go into the field.

Missionaries from the West were circling the globe, financed by donations raised through personal support and contributions from denominational mission agencies that drew support from member churches.

This model is still commonly illustrated via a world map hung in the foyer of the church and dotted with brightly colored pushpins to mark where the church-supported missionaries are working. A piece of tightly-drawn yarn connects each pushpin to a photograph of the missionary and family or coworkers, accompanied by a card with their names and the focus of their activity in that region. Every few years, the missionaries come through on deputation, featured in a missions weekend event, and share stories of what they’re doing to hopefully inspire the congregation to continue its support.

This model is still a dominant method in missions today. Over the last century and a half, it was largely responsible for the incredible growth of evangelicalism in the majority world. It’s still responsible for sending thousands of missionaries and millions of dollars overseas from the West. This practice of local churches supporting missionaries is also the dominant model used by a fast-growing cohort of autochthonous mission agencies who are already responsible in our current era for sending out thousands upon thousands of cross-cultural missionaries.

## The Era of Outcomes

Then along came the paradigm I first encountered, and, I must admit, championed with some vigor until a few close friends from the majority world decided that gently correcting me was a godlier task than seeking my help as a grant-maker. The Era of *Outcomes* slammed into the world of mission funding in the 1990s. In this paradigm, givers—particularly individual large donors and evangelical foundations—began seeking additional insights into the work of the missions and missionaries they were supporting.

Givers were not only interested in the presence and activity of missions overseas, they now wanted to know the outcomes of the mission activity they were supporting. Some givers were even seeking provable evidence of spiritual outcomes. In its most benign form, the evidence sought was a simple counting of the fruit produced by the funds they were giving.

This is not as easy as it may seem. First, it begs the question: What is fruit? Is it baptisms for an evangelist, disciples for a pastor, or perhaps a useful measurement of churches planted? Of course, the latter then begs the question: what is a church?

I once encountered a small autochthonous missions team that said they planted a church a day by walking into the center of a village mid-day and telling the gospel story. When they got halfway through the story, they would stop and say, “If you want to hear more, meet us by a tree just outside the village.” There, they told the rest of the gospel story and presented the plan of salvation to whoever showed up. They then formed a church from those who had committed their life to Christ and appointed the villager who had asked the best questions to be the pastor.

They gave the villagers some tapes to get started with and told the congregation they would return within a month to begin discipling them. I'm not sure if their model actually worked in every village they visited, but they counted each as having a church.

Simple counting, no matter what you were counting—churches, baptisms or salvations—didn't seem enough for givers. This only prompted other questions: "Are you being effective? Are you measuring and evaluating your activities? (And even more difficult to determine), are other organizations getting better results with less funding?"

This demand for a reporting of results did, however, bring a needed corrective to what, in some cases, had been a lack of clearly defined goals. But it also meant that overseas missions had to offer evidence of conformity to modern Western management practices before they could obtain funding from Western grant-makers and church missions committees.

In the granting community, there was a noticeable drift toward accepting self-fulfilling proposals. This comes about when the very questions leaders are asked become the very thing they try to accomplish. The danger is apparent: the giver is driving the strategies, perhaps at the expense of the ministry's calling from God. Perennial confusion about what could be accurately measured and how to do so ushered in a bewildering round of conferences, academic papers, and books that continues today.

This demand for reporting outcomes led to a debilitating chasm of cynicism between people on the same side of the mission to share the gospel. One majority-world leader told me, "In the eighties, we were evangelists, and the donors seemed happy. In the nineties, they wanted us to be church planters, so we

planted churches, and they seemed happy. Since 2000, they've wanted us to undertake holistic ministry—helping people while we evangelized them and planted churches—so we became holistic whiz kids, and they seemed happy. In all these cases, we did nothing different from what we'd always been doing.” His frustration was evident.

Additionally, even the cherished tradition of long-term commitments to Western missionaries began to waver. Missionaries were dropped from the regular support of churches that increasingly were pulling back from supporting their denominational mission structures and were spending more of their mission budgets on their own programs, including an increased emphasis on short-term missions. With this shift, givers began moving their funding from missionary support to *project* support, the results of which were easier to track.

And of course, this led to more and more givers traveling to see the field, which led to more questions. It didn't take long for a collective headache to begin encroaching on those in long-term missions. The increased emphasis on reports and measurable results brought unintended consequences. Within a few years, allegations of falsified field reports began to tarnish the reputations of even highly respected mission organizations and leaders. Some missions created extrapolated research. An example of the kind of thinking behind this uncertain process of estimation might be: “If a certain church planter plants one church a month, and there are twelve other church planters, that means twelve churches are being planted each month. Let's state that in our proposal, and since our missionaries raise their own support, we have little to no fundraising costs. We pay our office significantly

lower wages than the private sector, so we can claim low overhead as well. Let's report that also."

Seems out of bounds, doesn't it? Yet all of these cobbled-together claims were communicated to me verbatim. Unfortunately, because the "power" appears to be with givers, fund seekers provide these types of answers to appease supporters who aren't aware of the complexity of reporting outcomes. Yet, as those who experienced this paradigm know, a lot of good came out of that time as well as a few things that needed to be corrected. In fact, the overarching idea of a communion of giving and receiving was a direct result of significant efforts to correct outcomes-based funding. And just in the nick of time, because concurrent to those developments the next era rolled in.

### **The Era of Ownership and Engagement**

A decade or so before Jenkins's *The Next Christendom* defined for us the new reality we were facing with the explosive growth of Christianity, many of us involved in evangelical mission philanthropy began to sense the potential strength of Christian autochthonous leaders. At the time, we used the word *indigenization* to describe this paradigm of *ownership* and *engagement* by local leaders.

In the mid-1990s at First Fruit, we called it the "Success Paradox." On one hand, we considered it a success to be making an increasing number of grants to autochthonous organizations, though these grants usually involved a lot more discovery work and smaller dollar amounts owing to smaller operating budgets. On the other hand, Western grants to autochthonous organizations headquartered overseas were harder to make than larger

dollar grants to typical Western missions. They were also harder to find. We had to go where they were and sort through cultural dynamics to adjust to their context as much as we needed them to adjust to ours. Familiarity was the course of the day with Western-headquartered missions, no matter who the leader was.

When I started traveling to the overseas ministries we were seeking to fund in the early 1980s, many of the leaders I was introduced to had never met a representative of an American philanthropy. Yet, what they didn't know about me paled in comparison to what I didn't know about them, since often, I only had some pages ripped from an old Fodor's guide and my dog-eared copy of *Operation World*

to brief me. The topic of money wasn't even the biggest hurdle—expectations were. Often, neither party knew what the other was assuming or planning. I coached them on how to write proposals my board could fund, and, along with patiently mentoring me, they helped me understand the challenges of spreading the gospel where they were working. They bore the burden of educating me with the joy that became a communion of giving and receiving, including, at the most primary level, trying not to create dependency, much less resentment and confusion, while trying to serve each other.

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FINANCIAL POVERTY.**

I've observed that where the autochthonous church is strong, it has achieved some version of what is called the three-self model—meaning that churches are self-governing, self-financing, and self-propagating, despite debilitating financial poverty. Often these churches have undergone a difficult transition; they're no longer dependent on the funds brought through a foreign support base.

As autochthonous missional entrepreneurs like Michael take more and more responsibility for missions within their own contexts, this paradigm disrupts the long-established ways of funding missions. We've entered the Era of *Ownership and Engagement* when majority-world Christian leaders, rather than Western missionaries and boards, own their mis-

sion efforts, including governance, finance, results, and growth. And they proactively engage as full and equal partners with anyone coming alongside them on their journey to accomplish their calling. Western givers, no matter the size of the donation they intend to make,

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should give heed to this new paradigm. Daniel, the Romanian with the old gym socks, and the Egyptian did, and look where it got them.

There's real spiritual power in this concept of ownership and engagement. As these leaders are able to develop local resources, they bring in the covering and fellowship of their fellow Christians nearby who join the good fight for souls. As these local believers and the churches they attend exercise generosity

(in many cases out of abject financial poverty) and invest their money into the work, they share ownership and responsibility for the work. This fellowship builds strength, and strength builds confidence. And confidence is attractive to future partners.

Everywhere I've traveled, I've seen churches supported by their local congregations; however, in the past, the first few generations of many of these churches were dependent on their Western founders for their missional outreaches. Now, in this post-colonial era, they are self-sustaining in the core operations of their missional work and can invite outside participation as true equals. Sustained interdependence exists when each partner—giver, receiver, or agency—works together and is financially sustained for their own core operations within a local context. This may be easy for givers depending on the source of their money, but, nonetheless, their money can accomplish nothing without the partner who is seeking the transformative effect of the gospel in the fields where they work. This need for sustained interdependence is also true for the ministry or individual seeking to realize Kingdom goals. The transformation they seek, that also attracts givers, needs resources to be accomplished. In this era, to achieve ownership and engagement, the autochthonous leader must first seek a communion of giving and receiving within his or her own local setting.

This then sets the stage for a true and equal partnership in a cross-cultural or international setting, where each offers the other what they need in pursuit of their mutual callings. When this happens, the partnership goes beyond mere financial transaction and lays the foundation for a transformative communion of giving and receiving across cultures and vast financial gaps.

And now, we come to the biggest challenge in this new paradigm.

### **The Money Question**

When beginning the journey toward a God-directed calling to funding or working in missions, the money question is the one that usually trips up the missional entrepreneur first. Just about everything else seems doable, even if only on a small scale. But when the inevitable question arises, “Where will my help come from?” faith turns a calling into accomplishment.

Yet, the question is valid, and it must be asked . . . but it should be asked *last*. Ask it first, and you might limit your ability to imagine and dream about the scope of your ministry. Ignore the question, and you risk being like the man who began to build his house but ran out of funds before putting the roof on. Raising the question last puts it where it can be asked most easily. By then, you’ll likely have done some planning and formed a

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reasonable idea of a required initial budget. You’ll know the strategies you want to begin with, and you might even have a good sense of how to communicate with others what you want to accomplish.

Especially for a majority-world missional entrepreneur, the money question—regardless of when it’s asked—always looms large. And a great temptation lies before both the funder and the fundraiser. In places where most autochthonous leaders are following their

calling, in areas where a low base of cash and wealth exists, or where there may be wealth but a mature stewardship culture has not yet developed, the best-run, best-funded ministries may well be led by Westerners or by a local indigenous leader solely funded by Western sources.

This presents a discouraging challenge for even the most optimistic and forward-looking missional entrepreneur. If Westerners appear to be the only ones with money, the autochthonous leader is tempted to ask, “Where’s my American?” But such thinking is based on some lingering wrong assumptions.

Particularly harmful is the stubborn belief that the money is in the West. While that was largely true years ago, times have changed. In recent years, a large number of ministries founded by Western agencies have received a “sustainability letter” announcing a pullback of Western financial support, along with the suggestion that the ministry come up with a “sustainability strategy” for funding its continued work.

I have a Latin American friend—well-versed in fundraising and management practices—who was approached by leaders of a prominent seminary in his country. They had just received such a letter from their sponsoring agency in the United States. With alarm, the seminary’s leaders were staring into a future of steep cutbacks in faculty support, scholarship funding, and publishing and curriculum development projects. My friend helped them understand that American evangelical givers in the second decade of the twenty-first century have been turning their attention away from Latin America toward less evangelized fields. The seminary was being forcibly ushered into this new Era of Ownership and Engagement. They’ll have to build their own

fundraising operation in pursuit of local funds, and until they find them, they'll have to severely trim back their programs. This is not a one-off situation; much of my coaching and that of my colleagues centers on the struggle for sustainability. The answer can be found in our worship communities everywhere in the world, not merely in our giving, but in our preaching.

Hudson Taylor, the nineteenth-century missionary who pioneered evangelical missions in China, laid out the cause of a communion of giving and receiving in his paper (written to the whole Christian church), "To Every Creature." He called for urgent action on four fronts: "First, prayer for one thousand evangelists for China; second, 'united, simultaneous action by the whole body' of Christians; third, intelligent cooperation to avoid neglect in one region or duplication in another; fourth, sacrificial giving by churches and individuals in support of their missions."<sup>7</sup>

This simple approach is as powerful today as when Taylor first laid it out. If gospel-preaching congregations embrace these disciplines today—and every individual who says Jesus is Lord will carry them out, how much further will the darkness be rolled back?

Come on, surf the swell. The water is great. Jump in!

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## **When Money Goes on Mission**

. . . it serves the loving actions of the gospel. When there is a communion of giving and receiving, the exchange of money goes from a mere transaction to a transformative relationship of fellowship and equality at the foot of the cross between those who go, give, and send.