

## Missions and Money (1)

I want to launch in this Far Side column a series of discussions about missions and money. Let's focus initially on the WBS teacher's monetary relationship with the WBS student. The basic questions include the following:

- What should I, the correspondence teacher, do when students request money or other gifts?
- Doesn't my comparative wealth place me under some responsibility to help?
- Are there special needs to which I should respond?
- If there are such cases, how do I go about helping my students?
- In other words, how can I be helpful, without being hurtful?

These are questions that WBS teachers face, often beginning with the first student. The requests for aid are so heart-wrenching, and the decisions so difficult, that some teachers have literally resigned due to the stress. Of course, most stay on because they realize the great service they render just by teaching. Yet they frequently find themselves in the turbulent weather where two fronts meet. This is the perpetual squall line between rich nations and poor nations, which in the teacher's case may translate into endless struggles of conscience.

The seas along this convergence are stormy, and I have no intention of navigating alone through such a difficult topic. So here is an invitation: Whether you are a WBS teacher or a follow-up worker, a missionary or a scholar, please feel free to send me your input. Whatever your experience, if you have a viewpoint, please share it. Anecdotes to illustrate your point would be most welcome. If you know of good research, send me a copy or point me to the source. Perhaps you have a current case. Send your query.

I cannot promise to correspond with each person or to publish each item received. The combined effect of your offerings, however, should contribute to a more balanced and insightful series. Your experiences and examples will help to clarify complex issues. Your advice should greatly assist WBS teachers in making wiser decisions. There is no way to avoid squalls and storms. But there are ways to strengthen the WBS boat so that it reaches the divine destination. We want to learn the answers that make us more effective as Gospel teachers and as guides towards spiritual maturity.

One missionary said, "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." He also said, "I have received full payment and even more. The gifts you sent are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God." Missions and money – what a potent mixture, either for great harm or for great good! Let's make sure that our money helps and does not hurt.

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## Missions and Money (2)

John ends his first letter, not with a customary farewell, but with a warning: “Dear children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 Jn 5:21). How strange. Surely God’s children are not prone to idol worship. Is such a warning even relevant for us? After all, we are children of God *and* children of an enlightened age. John’s warning may apply to backward regions, but not to us. If we think that way, we are of all people most ignorant and foolish. Idolatry is as pervasive as ever it was in the days of Samaria or Athens. Idolatry wreaks as much havoc in secular America as it does in Hindu India. A brother in Oklahoma has encountered both cultures, and this is his testimony:

*I first traveled to India in the summer of 1998, after years of financially supporting various works there. I was thrilled to be making this trip with my family, thinking we were to be front line soldiers in perhaps the greatest evangelistic effort of our time.*

*Beginning with that starry-eyed first trip, I learned many things about India: its people, its culture, its predominant religion, and our evangelistic endeavor. Some of the things I learned stole my sense of optimism for the work there and replaced it with bitter tears.*

*Reports of Christianity spreading like wildfire, led me to believe I would see a spiritual revolution taking place. I found hope in that belief, thinking that if one nation, given to idolatry could be reached with the Gospel, then perhaps America, infected as she is with a different but no less destructive form of idolatry, could be moved to return to God.*

*During that first trip it seemed that most of what I had been led to believe was true. Although there were some things that raised questions in my mind, I wrote them off as culture shock and dismissed them. The things that came to light during my second trip made me realize that all I had seen was a carefully staged charade aimed at separating Americans from their money.*

*It seemed that what we had exported to India was not Christianity, but the same unholy worship of the Almighty Dollar that threatens to forever alienate our own nation from God. My heart was broken again with each new revelation of deception and hypocrisy. The name of God was being blasphemed, and it was my own ignorance and hastiness that had helped to finance and strengthen the perpetrator, a man whose actions outraged even the Hindus.*

*If it was just a matter of men preaching without the right motivation, I could rejoice that Christ was being preached, as Paul did (Php 1:18). But in this case the deceivers are insulating our efforts from those who might truly become faithful Christians. Ephesians 5: 11 demands two tasks of me: first that I have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, and further that I expose them. To that end I have listed some of the lessons we learned, in the hope that they will help others avoid the heartbreak we have endured.*

We plan to look at those lessons. For now we simply want to acknowledge that we work in a fallen world, whether at home or away. John warned us against idols for good

reason. Idols are all around us. Sometimes we recognize them in the lives of others, but not in our own lives. In many respects the modern equivalent to Baal is the Almighty Dollar. Yet the dollar can also be the sacred currency of Christian giving and service. What spiritual alchemy turns “filthy lucre” into “treasure in heaven”? How can our money further the one Kingdom rather than fuel idolatry? The answer begins with perspective, and we begin that discussion next time, Lord willing.

### **Missions and Money (3)**

The Old Testament’s account of the bronze serpent has a fascinating sequel. You remember that God commanded Moses to make a bronze serpent and to raise it on a pole. All who looked to this sign were healed from snake bites (Nu 21). God intended that sign to point to the cross of His Son (Jn 3), but many Israelites perverted it. They gave it the name Nehushtan and treated it like a god (2Ki 18).

How can the same object serve such contradictory purposes? How can such a useful instrument turn into a damning idol? The answer is “perspective” – the way people *view* that object. The same is true with missions and money. How we view the role of money makes all the difference. Our perspective can turn money into the “minister” of missions, or Frankenstein-like into the “monster” of missions. There are many encouraging stories on the “minister” side, beginning with Luke 8:3, “These women were helping to support them [Jesus and the apostles] out of their own means.” There are plenty of horror stories on the “monster” side, beginning with Judas whose habit of pilfering led to the ultimate betrayal for 30 pieces of silver (Jn 12-13; Mt 26-27).

Paul plainly stated his perspective in his letter of thanks for support sent by the Philippians: “I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.... Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account” (Php 4:11-12,17). During Paul’s early days in Corinth he received no support. Yet he continued to preach while he made tents (Ac 18). Donations did not determine Paul’s mission or his pursuit of it.

Indeed, the Lord seemed to emphasize how little wealth had to do with effective evangelism. Jesus, the Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith, was rich but chose to become poor (2Cor 8:9). He did this “for your sakes.” Yet we who benefit seldom see the sense of that perspective. We think, “Look at how much more can be accomplished with more money.” Think seriously about the Master’s perspective. Why did Jesus deliberately handicap Himself when a large work fund could have done so much good? Could His earthly life have been a lesson about missions and money?

Perhaps Jesus was a special case. What about those who followed Him? Paul described himself as “poor, yet making many rich; [as] having nothing, and yet possessing everything” (2Cor 6:10). He described all the apostles in similar terms: “To this very

hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands” (1Cor 4:11-12). Peter’s miracles could have raked in millions, but he honestly admitted, “I do not possess silver and gold” (Ac 3:6).

These were the main missionaries of the church! Was God making them an object lesson for the rest of us? Yes! And that lesson has everything to do with the perspective God wants us to learn. Poor people may see it sooner. We who are rich are nearly blind to this perspective. That is why we are so foreign to the kingdom (Mt 19). That also explains why we make so many mistakes in missions. Like Simon who “offered them money” (Ac 8:18), we might think that our earthly wealth can somehow be translated into spiritual power. We have much to learn. The first lesson has to do with dependence. We begin that discussion next time, Lord willing.

### **Missions and Money (4)**

Recent writings and events marked 100 years of missions in Africa. They also reminded us of fundamental lessons of faith. Read Sam Shewmaker’s book, *A Great Light Dawning*. It describes Africa’s spiritual heroes. God used them to bring about truly impressive success. But as you learn more about each hero or heroine, a common element emerges: Most of them were relatively poor and suffered various disadvantages. Their labors were grueling and often unappreciated at the time. They died knowing little of their cumulative effect, but they welcomed it from afar. We, who follow later, marvel to see the outcome. What was their secret? The answer, as Hebrew 12 reminds us, is *the Constant* of their lives, and of our lives, and of all future lives.

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever* (Heb 13:7-8).

As was true of first century saints, the secret of these pioneers was not their wealth, of which they had little. Nor was it their formal education. Nearly all the missionaries lacked training considered basic today, and many of their initial converts were in the first generation of their people to read. Nor was it their perfect personalities – a third generation missionary like myself has few such illusions. No, like Paul, they were inadequate for their overwhelming tasks. Their very earthiness as clay vessels proves that their adequacy came from God alone.

2 Corinthians, which discusses clay jars, is a classic on missions and money. Detractors of Paul’s mission work looked at its outward appearance (literally its “face,” 10:7). They saw his severe trials, his distress, his many opponents, his changed plans, his unpolished speech, and his unimpressive presence. They saw that he owned little or nothing, and was often hungry, thirsty and cold (6:10; 11:9,27). All these they saw as signs of weakness and failure, a view that false teachers were quick to exploit. Paul, of course, did not seek persecution and poverty. He accepted support when it came from Philippi, and he prayed for relief from his “thorn in the flesh.” But the key to his mission work

was never the money or the health. The lack of either simply emphasized the one essential skill of all Christian ministry: *dependence on God* (1:9; 3:5; 4:7; 5:7; 6:7; 9:8; 12:9-10).

Dependence on money has always been the great rival to dependence on God. “You cannot serve both God and Money” (Mt 6:24). We must be very clear about what we seek. Do we seek the King, with His rule and righteousness? Or do we seek the things pagans seek? Do we seek the Giver or the gifts? Seekers of the Giver worship in spirit and truth; seekers of gifts end up as idolaters. The former are free from the love of money; the latter depend on money. The former become heroes of faith; the latter spawn hirelings. The former make disciples; the latter gather ‘rice christians.’ The former reflect their King to the world; the latter eventually turn the world against Him.

These two different kinds of seekers have divergent motives and results. Yet at some stages of their mission work they look alike – simply Christians trying to get a job done. How is the supporter to tell them apart? The answer begins, not with examining others, but with testing ourselves. To borrow another thought from 2 Corinthians, “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves” (13:5). In other words, on what do *I* depend? What do *I* really seek? Where are *my* daily priorities? Specifically, how central is money to *my own life*? Master this matter of dependence honestly at the personal level. Then the mystery of missions and money begins to unravel.

### **Missions and Money (5)**

This column boldly asserts that the key to mission work is dependence on God, not money. Furthermore, each of these dependencies is the arch-enemy of the other. Many find such assertions unrealistic. They quip, “That sounds so spiritual, but just watch what happens when the money runs out.” That is the point. When the money runs out, those who depend on it quit. Those who rely on the Lord keep evangelizing one way or another (Ac 18).

Lest you find this discussion too idealistic, permit me to give a very real example that is also very personal. My grandparents, Alva and Margaret Reese, were some of our earliest missionaries to central Africa. In preparation for going, they tried hard to raise the necessary support but had little success. Some American churches were among the poor and others were not interested in missions. So the Reeses eventually sailed for Africa with only a promise of \$10 in regular support. They arrived in Zambia in March 1929. The U.S. stock-market crashed in October 1929, followed by four years of turmoil and poverty called the Great Depression. Thus even the meager amounts promised often failed to materialize.

Alva made articles of wood – scotch carts and furniture – to sell in an effort to support his family. Like most missionary families the Reeses grew some of their own food and had occasional opportunities to hunt for meat. In times of hunger, the missionaries learned which weeds were edible and added those to their diet. Alva traveled into the interior in

search of wild cattle that he bought from the native owners. (Some were likely seeing a white man for the first time, for this period was not long after the ground-breaking explorations of David Livingstone.) When Alva returned with wild cattle, it was the task of his teenage son Boyd – my father – to domesticate the cattle so that they could be sold at market. The work was hard and dangerous. Boyd had several narrow escapes while handling aggressive bulls. These were the things that had to be done to continue the mission work in Africa.

If our fathers had waited for adequate financial resources, they would never have carried God's mission beyond the oceans. They put God's kingdom first. God fulfilled His promise to add what their bodies needed. He worked through their labors to grow and to gather food. He also worked through gifts that seemingly dropped from heaven. At one point, Alva sent a telegram to an American friend with the simple message: "no food, no money, no credit." At the very time when the local store owner cut off further credit, a check for \$500 arrived to erase the debt and allow a fresh beginning.

If any passage of Scripture captures the great lesson of those early missionaries it is Genesis 22:14, "So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, 'On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided'." Their mountain was their mission work. The Lord had, through the Great Commission and the circumstances of their lives, called them to climb that particular mountain. Their climb involved many personal sacrifices, even the willingness to lay down life itself. Many went to Africa never fully expecting to see their homeland and their loved ones again. Furloughs were luxuries that few could contemplate. They could not see where the resources for survival, much less great works, would come from. They could not see how progress would be made. But God had told them to do it, so they stepped out in faith to do His will.

Did they need food, clothing and the other things money can buy? Sure, they needed those things as much as anyone else does (though what we label "needs" other languages rightly call "wants" and even "luxuries.") They were in need of things, but did they *depend* on those things? That is a radically different question, a question basic to all matters of missions and money. The answer of those pioneer lives testifies that they depended on God. Their answer was real, lived under back-breaking loads, far from the ivory towers of theorists. Their lives remind us that God's purposes should never be held hostage to materialism. By faith they followed in the footsteps of Paul, who followed in the footsteps of Jesus, in that they pressed on with the divine mission whether in poverty or in plenty. Through their struggles they learned the meaning of "Yahweh-Yireh." The Lord really does provide!

### **Missions and Money (6)**

I wrote last time about my grandparents, illustrating that missions depends on the Master, not money. Now meet their missionary partners, J.C. and Joyce Shewmaker. Their story is told in *Putting Out The Fleece* by Charles Webb, published by J.C. Choate (an

excellent source of missionary biographies), and also in *A Great Light Dawning*, edited by their son Sam Shewmaker at Harding University.

J.C. and Joyce were school teachers. Like many young couples, they struggled financially after college. Their circumstances gradually improved, only to be set back by the Great Depression. Again they struggled and recovered, only to find the Great Commission confronting them more strongly than ever. After years of yearning and preparation, their special call came in 1938 when my grandparents, home on their first furlough after 10 years, insisted that the Shewmakers were needed in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia).

For the Shewmakers this meant abandoning hard-won careers and inviting a life of poverty. In their own words, “We left Arkansas with \$40 in our pockets, no tickets and no promise of support. We were going out on the promise of the Lord, ‘Go, and I will be with you.’ That’s the only promise we had.” As they left, a friend said, “J.C., you are the biggest fool I’ve ever seen! You are taking these two boys to Africa to bury them!” (One of their sons literally fulfilled that prophecy.)

They arrived in New York without travel funds. This was their way of “putting out the fleece” (Jdg 6). If the Lord wanted them in Africa, He would provide. He did just that through various members of the church. A local church leader, an optometrist, gave J.C. his first pair of glasses. Such help, of course, did not mean they were well off. When their ship arrived at Cape Town, the Shewmakers had to borrow the \$20 for the landing fee. In Northern Rhodesia they too learned how to survive in order to evangelize.

Later J.C. recalled, “In 1939, we left with a promise of \$10 support (which was never sent) and without even a treasurer to forward funds. It was a step of faith, which has been rewarded a hundred fold.... I was prepared to work at any honorable labor to be able to carry the ‘words of eternal life’ to a people who had not heard.” Eventually the years of poverty gave way to better support, only to be challenged by another great trial. Doctrinal disputes plagued America. Missionaries were expected to publish their party alignment, or else lose support. J.C. responded, “I cannot give up my freedom in Christ for filthy lucre’s sake.... The doors God opens, none can close. All my support from the homeland may be cut off... and there may be many church pulpits closed to me, but if these hands must take some time to ‘make tents’ that the Gospel might be preached, they are not too good to do it. The Lord would not lead me to Africa to starve, for David said, ‘I have been young and now I am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.’ My first duty is to look to my own heart, to see that it is clean and pure before Him and then trust Him for the necessities of life.”

J.C. and Joyce paid a heavy price at that time, mainly through damage to their reputation. That same letter sadly noted, “Like the Pharisees of the time of Christ, these brethren, having failed to find fault with my teaching, have attacked my Christian character.”

Why did J.C. and Joyce risk so much? They depended on their God, not on their supporters. They placed principle above popularity. They valued conscience more than

cash. They were true missionaries, not hirelings. They honored the Lord, and we now honor them.

### **Missions and Money (7)**

What common experience is shared by nearly every cross-cultural worker from the U.S.A. and Canada, whether a missionary, a visiting evangelist, a campaigner, a medical worker, or a WBS correspondence teacher? If you fill any of these roles, you know that one answer that soon emerges is this: “Requests for money and other material things.” Why is this?

I have worked side by side with evangelists visiting from elsewhere in the world. Their experience seems quite different. Few if any such requests come their way, while the North Americans are besieged by suitors. Why is this?

The answer has something to do with American wealth. The poverty in many other places is crushing, and the needs are great. Many requests sincerely seek the welfare of the kingdom. What if places and roles were reversed? If North Americans suffered such hardships, they likely would be the ones making the requests. They might even say what we hear in various versions: “Your wealth is *the key* to our successful church growth. If you send your dollars, we will grow.”

The implication, also stated on occasion, is obvious: “If you don’t provide this key, the doors of progress and growth will not open for us.” Another implication, which may or may not be articulated, is this: “If we just had the kind of money you rich churches have, we would be as strong as you are.” The perception seems to be that the Lord’s church is wonderfully strong in the North America, and that the abundance of money has been the key to achieving that strength. Both perceptions are false.

First, North America remains a mission field in desperate need of attention. About 50% of the United States’ population is unclaimed by *any* religious group, making the U.S. the world’s 4<sup>th</sup> largest nation in terms of “unclaimed” and “un-churched” populations. Churches of Christ with which we are familiar are pathetically scarce in most states. Numbers tend to cluster in just 6 of the 50 states. The ‘strongest’ state, Texas, counts just 292,646 members out of a population of 21,779,893, with important ethnic groups nearly untouched. Out of a nationwide population of 290,527,506 residents, Mac Lynn’s 2003 count suggests a total of 1,276,533 members, placing this group about 11<sup>th</sup> down the list of organizations that claim to be Christian. Consider this group’s stresses and fractures. Consider the slow growth rates (at times decline rates) of recent decades. Add these considerations together, and you realize that the “wonderfully strong” view of American churches is a myth, a lie that lulls local members into complacency and fools others around the world.

Second, great wealth definitely was *not* the key to growth in the states now considered stronger in church numbers. Have you looked into the history of American churches that prefer the name “churches of Christ,” especially those that use only vocal music? Then

you know how ridiculous – literally laughable – is the notion that big bucks backed their early growth. Read the biographies. Talk with historians. Visit with older members. They often refer to early days as the time “when we were on the other side of the tracks.” Translated that means, “when we lived and held our church meetings on the poor side of town.”

During that period of relative poverty, churches were established in many counties and strong growth began. Later many of these churches “crossed the tracks,” meaning they gained social status and erected church buildings in affluent neighborhoods. Momentum carried them forward and wealth was often put to good use. Yet, in many cases, the years of increasing prosperity turned into years of slow decline. There are fine exceptions, but most wealthy churches today convert pitifully few in any given year. Despite well-paid staffs, they barely maintain the numbers left to them by poorer but more evangelistic founders. No, money is not the key to evangelism. If it were, rich churches would be thriving, rather than resting on a plateau or slowly dying. For that matter, if money were the key, such churches would never have started. Typically their humble beginnings trace back to a few dedicated pioneers who had faith and courage, but little else.

### **Missions and Money (8)**

#### A QUIZ FOR YOU

A man at the Jabulani Conference said: “I want to tell you about my country. Then I want you to guess what country I am from.”

See if you can guess.

In my country, there are only 144 miles of paved roads.

The average life expectancy is 47 years. A person over 50 is rare.

The average wage is 22 cents per hour.

95% of the babies are born at home.

Only 6% of the people have a high school education.

Various countries were guessed: Mozambique, Bengal, etc. The response each time was, “No, that’s not it.” And after many missed guesses, the speaker gave the answer. “It sounds like countries in Africa, but the country I have described to you is the United States, as it was 100 years ago.”

Makes you think, doesn’t it?

[Author's note: The theme of how churches of Christ grew in America around the time of my grandparents continues with "Missions and Money (11)." Articles 9 and 10 diverted briefly into other important aspects of missions and money as dictated by circumstances at the time of writing.]

### **Missions and Money (9)**

The quiz "What Country Am I From?" came from the Namikango Report, which attributed it to a speaker at the 2002 Jabulani Conference in Fort Worth. If you know the original author, please let us know so that we can give the appropriate credit. That quiz reminded us that in many ways the United States was a Third World nation when churches of Christ were growing well. Wealth did not drive their evangelistic success. We hope to continue that discussion soon. But today I must detour because a fund-raising form has just crossed my desk. It comes from a Third World nation and the preacher's name on it takes me back a number of years...

When I first met this man he was the preacher for one of his nation's largest churches. He surely received an adequate salary, yet he seemed to be preoccupied with WBS as a source of gifts and income. After the tour of his church's magnificent building, he separated me from the others and took me to his office. In furtive tones he let me know that he was quite secure in his position, but what he really wanted was to represent WBS with its American teachers. Just say the word and he would become God's answer to WBS' dreams.

I told him our policy about WBS not hiring evangelists. From that moment something happened to our relationship. The preacher had already worked hard to ensure the success of our outreach event that year, and we had many baptisms. But the following year the identical event produced comparatively little. He had neither organized well nor extended many invitations. His own participation in the event was muted. I could not help but wonder about the difference. Could it relate to our policy about pay?

Then, some time later, the news broke: The preacher had switched sides! For you to understand this news I must relate a sad phenomenon. In that Third World region, churches of Christ suffer periodic upheavals generated by dissident Americans and their funds. Their spies go among the churches literally buying the affiliation of any willing leader. The preacher in question was earning about the best his nation could offer. Yet that amount could never hope to compete with the buying power of US dollars. His many ties to mainline churches melted away at this new prospect for lucrative US connections. Suddenly the preacher, who previously had no interest in dissident doctrines, became their chief proponent. He miraculously began to sing the exact tune his pay-masters orchestrated from 10,000 miles away (one stanza of which denounces everything to do with WBS).

Imagine today's surprise when that preacher's name features prominently with a fund-raising form sent to *WBS* teachers! The unaltered appeal is as follows: "We are a small

but effective congregation team which is made up of members converted through WBS When campaigning for Christ. We are kindly begging fund from well wishers around the world to donate generously for the Gospel outreach.... As our Patron we invites you to help us to collect fund in your countries, for us to be able to travel into unreachable areas so as to plant many congregation.”

What golden-hearted Christian could possibly fail to support *Gospel outreach* that promises to *plant many congregations*? This appeal comes to a specific WBS teacher with her name carefully hand-written. All she has to do is gather funds then “return the collecting form together with fund for Auditing purposes.” What could be safer than an *audited* account?

Will the WBS teacher ever learn the true story behind this preacher’s name? What about the many others who receive his appeal? How can they know that, unless things have greatly changed, their funds may actually destroy their WBS students through this preacher’s newly adopted doctrines? My prayer is that they will learn wisdom! And read **Action!** And listen to experienced missionaries!

### **Missions and Money (10)**

The real war against terror is a spiritual war, for the true antidote to terror is peace. The Gospel brings peace to sufferers through the comfort and hope of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel can even bring peace to perpetrators through forgiveness.

Yet spiritual warfare is also fought at other practical levels. Jesus and His disciples traveled from town to town preaching the kingdom. Though simple, their travel involved necessary expenses. Thus Susanna, Mary Magdalene, Joanna and other women “were helping to support them out of their own means” (Lk 8:1-3). Similarly, Philippian Christians supported Paul’s mission. He wrote to them,

It was good of you to share in my troubles.... Even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent (Php 4:14,16,18).

Hear the practical urgency in Paul’s call to Timothy, “When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas.... Do your best to get here before winter” (2Tim 4:13,21). We who send Bibles and courses can appreciate Paul’s appeal for Timothy to bring “my scrolls, especially the parchments” (2Tim 4:13). Though physical, such items were among the essential armaments and munitions of spiritual warfare.

Such parchments were usually expensive. The printing press has changed all that, making possible billions of equivalents to scrolls and parchments. Indeed the price per piece – 45c for a 56 page WBS course – is so cheap that American Christians can send

lessons freely to their students. Worldwide postal systems usually deliver packages “before winter.” Where accessible, Internet communicates at blazing speed.

What do you think? Suppose Paul could reproduce major manuscripts at 45c apiece. Suppose he could count on delivery systems to every corner of the world. Suppose he could get hold of a notebook computer, and share his teachings by email. What would he do? Remember, this is the passionate apostle who declared,

I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some (1Cor 9:22).

In its context, “all possible means” refers to cultural adaptations. Yet Paul also used other “means” to promote the Gospel. He used road systems, ships, and the instruments of correspondence. For the divine cause, he took advantage of human laws, both Roman and Jewish. He utilized public and private platforms, from the synagogue to the forum, from hovels to wealthy homes. We are safe, therefore, in saying that “all possible means” can extend to the tools that help to get the job done. That, in turn, implies funding partnerships similar to the relationship between the Philippians and Paul.

What the visionary Paul could not envision, we today take for granted. The Lord equips His soldiers with unprecedented “means.” These means carry life-giving lessons further, faster and more prolifically than anyone previously imagined possible. The “information explosion” purposefully parallels the “population explosion.” Likewise, providence is at work in letting many Christians *afford* to help us ignite the “Gospel explosion.” The all-encompassing promise continues to be fulfilled:

God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work (2Cor 9:8).

Like Paul, we seek not the gift but “the fruit” that enriches the giver (Php 4:17). Who will be our modern Philippians? Where are today’s women that support labors of love “out of their own means”? Where Jesus is at work, there they are, because spiritual warfare is still intensely practical.

### **Missions and Money (11)**

To compare ourselves with ourselves, says Paul, is “not wise.” Yet we do it often – and often erroneously. Take North American wealth as an example. Many who lack perspective think of Americans as *all* rich and *always* having been so, which – they imagine – explains America’s progress in so many realms. In religious circles this idea translates as, “Our nation is poor (compared to America), that is why we have so few members (compared to America). We too could grow if we had the riches and resources of American Christians.”

Such unfavorable comparisons demoralize poorer brethren. Worse, they are misled by a myth with no basis in reality. Suppose preachers in under-developed nations could travel back into the history of America's restoration movement. They would find pioneering conditions back then remarkably similar to their own today.

Though I was born in Africa, my parents and their parents came from Missouri and Arkansas. In their region and time Joe H. Blue was a household name. He was an effective missionary, conducting hundreds of Gospel meetings and baptizing about 10,000 people. Franklin Puckett observed, "He certainly cannot be accused of becoming a preacher that he might have 'an easy job with a fat salary'."

Joe Blue, a poor man in an impoverished region, began preaching at age 21. Of that beginning he wrote, "I went into Sharp County and preached out in the sticks [forests], in homes and schoolhouses. I had [one] change of clothes...and four cents in my pocket. I did not say a word to anyone about my poverty. I was afraid they would think I was preaching for money. I preached all that year (1897) and baptized 75 and established one congregation. The brethren paid me \$19 for my work that year.... Many days I went to bed without dinner because I did not have enough money to buy it."

That autumn he married Mary Montgomery, then spent four years getting his home and farm going, while preaching on weekends. Thereafter Mary did most of the farming so that Joe could devote well over 50 years to fulltime evangelism.

Joe noted, "I have never been the man to complain about what the brethren have paid me for my work. I preached monthly (for a year) for a congregation and held their meeting, and they paid me \$4 for my work. I preached monthly for another congregation, twenty miles away, and they paid me one dollar and a bushel of seed corn. [After a colleague and he held an extended Gospel meeting] they paid us \$2 and a handkerchief apiece. When the meeting closed there was snow on the ground, and we walked home a distance of 46 miles. I have gotten off the train at Hardy, Arkansas, in the night, and taken my suitcase and walked home that night, a distance of 25 miles. Many times I have set up in a cold depot at night, because I did not have the price of a bed and enough to take me on to my meeting. I have done without something to eat in my travels just because I did not have money to buy it and get on to meeting."

Joe was pelted with eggs and also stoned. A failed fuse saved him from dynamite. He preached under guard and was threatened with hanging. He testified, "I have suffered all this for the cause of our Lord, and yet have not begun to suffer what our Lord suffered, or the apostles."

Jesus Himself said, "The Son of Man has no place to lay His head" (Lk 9:58). His apostles began their mission without purses or sandals (Lk 10:4). Joe was in good company. We join that exalted company when we let God work through our personal faith and sacrificial love – no matter where we happen to be on a comparative scale of wealth.

## Missions and Money (12)

Action newspaper is based in Texas. In case you hadn't guessed, its editor "Tex" Williams is also from Texas. What were the missionary roots of this state like? In answer, meet an early Texas preacher J.D. Tant.

Jefferson Davis Tant was born in Georgia in 1861. Eight days after his birth, his father went away to four years of civil war. As a three year old, J.D. watched Sherman's soldiers burn down the family home. For ten years the Tants struggled for survival. At age twelve, shortly after a snakebite nearly killed J.D., he entered school for the first time, only to leave in eight weeks unable to pay school fees.

In 1876 the family moved by wagon train to an untamed wilderness called Texas. They settled near a town called Austin. J.D. went to school but could not afford books. So, for two years, his teacher left a schoolroom window unlocked, allowing J.D. to borrow books for study by a small lamp – often until 3 a.m. Finally a charitable neighbor, along with money J.D. earned in reaping, helped him to finish what little schooling was available.

About 1880 the Methodists appointed J.D. a preacher – a "circuit rider" – with no circuit, no horse to ride, and no salary (apart from his own earnings in cotton picking, teaching and breaking wild horses). Intense studies led him to reject infant baptism, and to embrace New Testament Christianity. 1883 was the first time he received anything for his preaching, a year's total of \$9.75. The next year he received \$92 in all, at a time when schoolteachers earned \$40 per month.

J.D. walked barefoot most of the 45 miles to one preaching appointment. He finally borrowed a horse, and both went under while swimming across a swollen stream. Tant saved his new shoes, but one wet shoe would no longer fit. Arriving late, he started the Gospel meeting with one shoe on and one shoe off.

In 1890 J.D. married Laura Warren of Austin. They had two children. Laura ran their little farm while her husband traveled Texas preaching. She died in early 1894 from pneumonia caught in a winter storm while trying to save a cow.

Nearly three years later J.D. married Nannie Yater. At first Nannie's family opposed the marriage, knowing she would have "only hardship, sacrifice, long days and weeks of loneliness and privation." (Quotes come from her autobiography, or his biography by Fanning Yater Tant.) Their tender daughter, they felt, would surely "break under the strain and fill an early grave." But God forged J.D. and Nannie into a powerful partnership for evangelism spanning over forty years. I say "forged" because the fires of trial we continually fanned by uncertainty and debt, "the near-poverty level of living," severe malaria for him, and also the death of one child and near loss of another. Nannie summarized their years as "filled with incredible hardships and difficulties, but equally incredible have been the rewards and the happiness."

At one time her income from boarders and school teaching was \$125 per month, “far more than her preaching husband was making, or ever had made, or ever would make, in the evangelistic field.” That was said of a time when J.D. Tant was one of the most influential preachers in Texas, holding continual meetings, traveling to other states, and writing for Gospel papers. In the Firm Foundation of 1909 he told his fellow missionaries, “My dear preaching brethren, you are up against a hard proposition. Nine out of every ten will, in old age, have to become beggars.”

Much of the blame rested with brethren who could have helped but did not. Yet, supported or not, the work had to go forward. In 52 years of preaching, J.D. Tant baptized 8,000 men and women, of whom 100 became evangelists.

Oh, did we mention? J.D. Tant was the great uncle of Tex Williams.

### **Missions and Money (13)**

Paul’s review of his work among the Ephesians ends with this note on missions and money:

I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus Himself said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Ac 20:33-35).

God reserves His greater blessings for those who sacrifice. We see this principle in Paul’s progress. We witness it in our own pioneer missionaries, as exemplified by the Joe Blues and the J.D Tants.

Scripture and experience confirm that *sacrifice is the soil of healthy growth*. If we really believe that, why would we pull young plants out of their soil? Why would we deprive athletes of their hard training? Why would a mother keep carrying her child long after it should have learned to walk? The answer has to do with misplaced compassion. The mother, for example, cannot bear to see her baby struggling and falling as it tries to walk. She carries the child to protect it. Yet she actually penalizes the child, delaying its progress for as long as the mother’s misguided compassion persists. If the child is ever to walk alone, the mother must let the child try and fail and suffer, and keep on trying. Do we understand the necessity of “tough love” in such cases? Then we should also appreciate this universal principle as it affects mission fields.

These days we have the benefit of research to help us see the point. Take, for example, a study by Wayne Allen (Mission Frontiers Bulletin, January-February 1999). Allen’s denomination started a movement among the Dayaks of Indonesia in 1948. They operated in four districts that were adjacent and similar. District 1 never received outside funding for its national preachers. Beginning in different years, Districts 2, 3 and 4

received “extensive subsidy” to allow nationals to become full-time church workers. Records of comparative growth were kept from 1960 to 1990.

District 1 saw “a clear pattern of consistent growth.” 7 congregations in 1960 grew steadily to 23 in 1990. “This growth was achieved totally without subsidy for its national workers,” and despite two missionaries leaving. District 1 demonstrated that “church growth was possible among the Dayaks without the use of subsidy.”

District 2 received no outside support for its first decade, during which the number of congregations grew from 1 to 20. Then, from 1969 until 1989 “the district added only one new church despite the investment of \$61,961.” In Allen’s language, “the strong lay involvement in evangelism that was a key part of the initial growth in the area declined significantly.”

District 3 started 12 new congregations during its years without subsidy (1967 to 1970). \$41,514 was injected from 1970 to 1990, resulting in only 2 new congregations.

District 4 started in 1973 with a strong base of congregations from another mission. By 1975 it had 18 congregations. For its first decade “substantial sums of money [\$11,322] were invested...but no growth was realized.” Outside funding ceased in 1983, but the pattern had been set and the plateau of 18 congregations remained.

Allen summed up, “A comparison of the Decadal Growth Rates (DGR) of the four districts with the amount of subsidy received reveals that church growth ceased in Districts 2, 3 and 4 when the subsidy was initiated.” Factors related to subsidies included a move from reliance on lay responsibility to clergy responsibility, a drop off in local giving, and a tendency for supported workers to focus less on the mission and more on pleasing their funding sponsors.

In plain English, they were carried when they could have been walking.

### **Missions and Money (14)**

Let’s admit it. Many of us are softies. That’s why we became involved in WBS. We are tender-hearted and caring, especially for those who suffer in a world without Jesus.

Compassion comes from the Spirit of Jesus, and should always be nurtured. Unfortunately some cool their ardor, fearing that ungrateful people will take advantage of their kindness. They forget that God sent His Son well knowing that people would use Him and reject Him. They forget that Jesus kept healing, even after just one healed leper out of ten proved thankful. We want to love as He loves. But what is the truly *loving* thing to do?

Picture an African region where many live in abject poverty. Adult unemployment runs at 80%. The Lord’s church has a foothold through an old evangelist. For forty years he

has preached and taught, often walking bare-foot from village to village. Like his neighbors, he lives on vegetables grown around his shack – and occasional gifts from grateful members. Having recently learned of WBS, he spreads word of the free courses from America, and just as conscientiously follows up.

Students describe their destitution to their WBS teachers and plead for relief. Their tales of suffering cut deeply into a teacher's soft heart. She also feels guilty about her own wealth. So she sends what seems a small amount. Yet to her students it represents a year's worth of wages. Word spreads like wildfire: WBS is a gold-mine! Friends have hit the jackpot! Floods of students apply to try their luck. Many short-cut their Bible course studies, copying answers and avoiding discussion questions. Their letters sound mercenary. Some WBS teachers become frustrated and quit. Others plod on patiently, trying to focus on the Gospel and away from money motivations.

One bright student, however, understands the system. He answers all the lessons correctly, requests baptism, and announces himself ready to preach full time. His teacher knows better than to sabotage WBS by sending gifts. But this is different. Here is a chance to spread the Gospel more rapidly. After all, the student already knows the language and culture. And, compared with most missionaries, he comes at a bargain!

Actually this "bargain" converts into a "bonanza" in African currency. Soon the new preacher becomes a rich man. His prestige and power attract people who change the church.

The old preacher feels deeply hurt. He never had a bicycle, much less a car. Do his years of sacrifice and experience count for nothing? Why would the Americans hire an unproved novice? Why cooperate in further voluntary follow-up when hired hands run the show?

What if the young preacher, as a new convert, becomes "lifted up with pride" and falls "into the condemnation of the devil"? Local brethren had nothing to do with hiring him, so they cannot fire him. There is no accountability for a man who answers to no one local and has only to impress patrons 10,000 miles away. It all seems so unfair, so foolish, so destructive to years of painstaking growth... and all this damage in the name of WBS.

Missions and money – what an explosive combination! Its blasting power can clear a way for heaven's highway. Or it can blow up in your face. Good intentions determine the difference, right? Think again, especially if you are a softy like me. Truly Christ-like love works out how to help, not hurt, in the long run. Real love is *wise* love, *discerning* love, and often *tough* love.

### Missions and Money (15)

Another continent, another country, another city. On arrival, I look up a leading person in WBS follow-up. Let's call him Lameck. He is famous for long lists of baptisms, about the longest any individual produces regularly. I am anxious to meet him and to learn more about his great labors.

He welcomes me. We have a good visit. Everything seems positive. Yet, is there some reserve, some hint of tension? Probably not. It's just that I am a comparative stranger and have arrived unannounced.

Then I attend the local church. It seems well organized and growing, a fit leader for this thriving metropolis. It is near Lameck's home, but oddly he is not attending right now. Talking with one of the leaders, I extol Lameck's work and enthuse over visiting him. The leader's reaction plainly radiates disgust, even contempt. WBS seems to be similarly tainted.

I have no idea what this is all about. Have personalities clashed? Some misunderstanding perhaps? My next visit with Lameck reveals little. He seems to dismiss the local rejection as irrelevant. Learning more, I venture a question, "Lameck, suppose that a WBS student requests baptism, but he lives in the other large city across the country. How would you handle the teacher's request for follow up for that student?"

His answer takes me by surprise. "I would personally go to that city and baptize him."

"But Lameck," I insert, not sure of what I am hearing, "that's a great distance to travel. I have just visited there. There are many active congregations there, and even some full time WBS follow up workers. Surely you pass students on to Christians there, if only to assure their care after baptism."

Lameck insists that only he can handle baptism requests properly. Co-workers and local congregations seem to have no place in his method.

That explains Lameck's long lists of baptisms. He crosses the country to immerse as many as possible. But why? What is the point, if the local body is bypassed and spiritual nurture is ignored?

Over time the point gradually becomes clear. He thinks American teachers want baptisms, and he gives them whatever they want. Then he expects them to give him whatever he wants. He pursues money – often with heart-wrenching tales of woe – from WBS teachers who enter his web. As it turns out, many succumb to his impressive appeals and lists, and they remain numbly unaware of each other as donors. No local church or sponsor is involved. Like a king, he is accountable to no one, and adept at handling pawns. (At least this empire is expansive. I have known others who limit their follow up visits to only the students of their own supporters. They disregard other responsive students, even within easy reach, because they are not paid for those souls.)

For every opportunist, of course, there are hundreds of well motivated follow up workers. We know that fact, but it may not be known by brethren in a local situation. In many minds there, Lameck is not just any king. He is the king of WBS. He owns it. He runs it. He represents it far and wide. And honest local brethren want nothing to do with such an irresponsible empire. In that region, the work of salvaging WBS' reputation is daunting. Fortunately that particular problem is being solved.

But be sure of this: The unwary still wander its webs. And since churches have no jails, Lamecks are still at large.

### **Missions and Money (16)**

After my article about carrying those who should be walking, my friend Chuck Cromwell wrote agreeing with the principle, but also citing examples where support has worked. He concluded, "Obviously there are two sides to your coin, John!"

True, there is a shining side. So far I have exposed the darker side, the menace in the mix of missions and money. Why? Because so many seem unaware of the dangers as they interact in mission work through correspondence. We do want to flip the coin to its better side. But first let's wrap up this side by summarizing the problems that WBS teachers may unwittingly spark.

Consider the situation when a missionary is called upon to channel funds to local preachers. The dynamics of their relationship must change. Once a brother and co-worker, the missionary now may seem more like the patron, the supervisor, the employer and boss (or least an informer to employers), and even an enforcer and axe man. Problems abound when dealing with inefficient banks and fluctuating exchange rates in cultures heavy on corruption and light on receipts. Money moves uncertainly or seems to go missing. Motives may be misread. And all that is before the real difficulties when disengagement calls for funds to be reduced or stopped.

What about relationships between local brethren? One receives a Western-level monthly salary of \$1000s. Another's foreign sponsors aim for a local-level salary in the \$100s. Another gets nothing from rich nations; his local congregation pays him a laborer's wage in the \$10s. Under close supervision he works harder, while his two colleagues answer to no one local as they build their empires (preaching of course, but extra capital attracts business too). Might these inequities test relationships? Do power struggles ever develop? If you know human nature, you know that they do, and that such struggles can affect the entire church in a region.

What about the giving? How motivated are members to give, when all has been done for them? How eager are they to take over the support of their preacher at a salary 100 times larger than they earn? What preacher deliberately moves back to a local level after tasting the supported high life? What empire-builder wants to appoint elders who will

take control and hold him accountable? Certainly there are exceptions, but our concern here is the general rule.

What about converts? Do communities notice when certain preachers get rich? Do materially-minded people get any ideas? Be sure of this: When sinners board the gravy train they *will* stoke the engine of financial dependence. Their hopes for success, indeed their very livelihoods, depend on dependency. Therefore they must count as their enemies church leaders who work against dependency on foreign funds.

These problems, and more, are color-blind and nationality-blind. The rich may cause problems for the poor, and the poor for the rich, no matter which ethnicity happens to be the richer or the poorer. 1 Timothy 6:10 applies to all men: “The love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”

We all know this sad reality, often from personal experience. Like Paul, we are “not unaware” of Satan’s schemes. Why then would we play right into the devil’s hands by throwing cash at unfamiliar situations thousands of miles away? Pray for the wisdom that God gives so generously. That is the wisdom to invest in growth, not deformity; wisdom to set free, not enslave; wisdom to mature, not maim; yes, Chuck, the wisdom to emphasize the better, brighter side of the coin.

### **Missions and Money (17)**

I want to express thanks to all of you who have written to us regarding the “Missions and Money” articles. Some have requested the compiled series to date, and with the Lord’s help (volunteer help would be good too) that will soon be available.

We are now transitioning to the more positive side of the Missions and Money picture. If you have examples of success, and helpful solutions, please send those. But please make sure of all the facts.

Back in June, two very special teachers sent a story about a WBS student they have known for 15 years. They acknowledged that the gist of my articles had been “very true and important,” but they wanted to offer “the reverse” side of the discussion. We want to keep the conversation from becoming personal, so let’s call their student Malcolm. Their relationship with Malcolm developed in ways that gradually earned their confidence. They donated study books and an old laptop to help his growing outreach. “We quickly learned that he would never ask for help and we had to find out his needs from others.”

More recently, multiple crises hit Malcolm. His mother died. His older brother, a Muslim, persecuted him. The cell phone he used for evangelism was stolen. New government policies ended university studies by which he was to become self-supporting. Funds meant for Malcolm had been embezzled, to which the culprit, a veteran preacher,

confessed publicly by email. Our WBS teachers were grateful to support Malcolm who evangelized with “unlimited energy” despite such setbacks.

Prior to press time, however, a second letter arrived. Our two teachers urgently hoped we had not used the article about Malcolm. “Last week we learned that [Malcolm] created an e-mail fraud” so elaborate that he could hardly have “found time to do any good works.” The mother who died last February “is very much alive.” His Muslim brother “is just a fake name.” The veteran, at 60 years of age, “doesn’t own a computer” and “does not have an email address,” and thus was not the source of the email ‘confession.’ Local elders and the police have intervened. “...And we are still trying to learn the truth.”

How well that states our position: *We are still trying to learn the truth.* The truth has more than one facet. True, “the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure” (Jer 17:9). More positively, it is also true, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Cor 5:17). Heavenly integrity remains rare on earth, but things are improving. Jeremiah searched for “but one person who deals honestly,” yet he failed miserably (Jer 5). Now, in the Messiah’s kingdom, many have been born anew. Many hearts are being renewed to reflect God’s true righteousness (Eph 4). We need their stories, especially as they illustrate integrity, wisdom and genuine progress. Help us understand the principles for rising above immature dependency. We need to learn the truth about money’s place in effective missions.

### **Missions and Money (18)**

World Bible School, by that name, has been hard at work for 32 years. Well-plowed experience has yielded a crop of basic policies. Among the simplest and most emphatic maxims is this: **WBS teachers should not send money or gifts to their students.** The WBS Introduction Lesson tells students that WBS will not enrich them materially. One student, waxing lyrical about his studies, said this:

God bless WBS – for it was them who offered me the truth,  
They offered no earthly gifts or prizes – nor do they offer worldly wealth,  
But they were offering something special – valuable...  
And the thing was the good knowledge of the Bible.

This student takes to heart WBS’ purpose better than some teachers do. The heart is at the heart of the matter. What is the motivation for studying with WBS? Hearts set on learning will seek and find God’s message. But hearts set on material gain will use the same lessons as rungs in their ladder to reach pickings, then plunder.

The world has no shortage of idolatrous hearts. Indeed, a slight change of wording in WBS ads and Intros, the merest suggestion of “things” offered, would draw multitudes more to WBS overnight. Similar hints in courses would increase retention rates dramatically. Were the hearts of WBS editors set on inflated numbers or quick results, they could get them easily by engaging lower motivations. But our hearts are well

expressed by 2 Corinthians 2:17, “Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.”

We urge teachers likewise to keep WBS above board and spiritually effective by refusing to play to ulterior motives. How often we have seen it: Just a little well-intentioned money for a student, just a few rewards, and WBS takes years to recover a healthy tone in that community.

“But I know my student is good hearted.” All the more reason to help his motives stay pure!

“Are you saying that I should not help the poor?” Jesus clearly urges us to help the poor. He also urges us to be wise. To mix expectations of financial gain into your WBS teaching is most unwise. There are better ways to help, which we plan to discuss in future sessions.

“But my student is exceptional!” Add up all the other WBS teachers who feel the same way, and the exception soon becomes the rule. Whether as exception or as rule, unwise practices undermine the WBS teaching goal. They also alienate field evangelists and missionaries who must clean up after our messes. We depend on these dedicated brethren for follow up. So let’s listen to their combined wisdom when they plead with us to keep WBS clean and simple.

### **Missions and Money (19)**

Karen brushes her tears off her student’s letter, smudging some words beyond recognition. That hardly matters since they are seared into Karen’s heart. The WBS student, Mara, is barely out of her teens. Her husband recently abandoned her, but not before leaving his marks: Beating marks. Birth marks from bearing four children, of whom two have died. Unseen viral marks left by HIV. Mara has AIDS. She says local people call it “slim.” It has already ravaged her body, especially now that she has no money for nutritious foods, much less medicines. She pleads with Karen to send her money before it is too late.

**Action** newspaper is next in Karen’s pile of mail. She is astounded to read, “WBS teachers should not send money or gifts to their students.” Who is this columnist – this Reese fellow – to tell Christians to reject victims like Mara? Is a teacher’s compassion to be cut off like a light switch?

To the contrary, the message of **Action** and of all WBS is emphatic: “Switch on your compassion! Keep it burning brightly!” That is *why* you are a WBS teacher. So speed the Gospel to Mara. Rush to her *This Is Good News* (the ‘floating’ course that can be inserted anywhere in the WBS series. As a summary of all the courses it can help in emergencies like this.) Send her the Bible message of comfort and hope. Educate those

around her in caring for AIDS victims. And – still in compassion – handle any money matter with utmost care and consideration.

Consider, for example, that from 15,000 miles away you alone have no real way to know Mara's true identity and condition. Consider that money sent directly runs a high risk of being stolen or misused. Consider that it may ruin the chances for hundreds of other spiritual Maras. That path is well-paved by now: Wherever WBS gets a reputation as a "cash cow," opportunists and con artists milk it. They absorb the time and resources of WBS teachers. Genuine seekers get less and less attention, then lose *all* opportunity when their teacher quits. Multitudes of disillusioned teachers have dropped out when too many ill-motivated applicants buried their hope of a harvest. That is not merciful! True compassion keeps the path clear for the all-important Gospel to run without hindrance... for just such people as Mara.

Well, what about Mara's health needs? If firm evidence makes a compelling case, contact the local brethren nearest to her. You would contact them anyway for follow up, wouldn't you? They are in a far better position to ascertain the need and the solution. If that includes your contribution for medicines and foods, then send it through a local church of Christ, preferably one with elders or with proven reliability. Insist that your donation be given in the name of Christ and His body locally, and that you remain *anonymous* as a financial source.

Local leaders recognize the importance of keeping WBS free from materialism. They appreciate being taken into consideration. Their warmth and love can do far more for Mara than any amount of cold cash by itself. Jesus' body stretches around the world. Its teamwork brings glory to Him and blessings to students like Mara.

### **Missions and Money (20)**

You can't argue with success. The reports keep coming with regularity: so many taught, so many baptized, another church started. This must be any supporter's dream, right? Yes... from a distance.

I truly rejoice in seeing people brought to Jesus. I live for Him and for more people to meet Him. That explains my part in WBS, and my desire to see its great effectiveness become greater.

My problem is a deficiency of distance.

You see, I do what some supporters seldom do. I visit the Far Side – those fields where WBS helps to sow Gospel seed and reap fruit for eternity. Typically my purpose there is to arrange for WBS student recruiting or follow-up. I am not trying to inspect anyone's work. I just make the simple mistake of arriving, which reduces the distance and sharpens what was blurred.

Coming into town, I make contact with the local congregation as usual. I ask to speak with the leaders about their help in distributing WBS enrollment forms and flyers. Normally there is a warm welcome. But this reception seems reserved, cautious, perhaps even fearful. It seems that the local elders are engaged in a power struggle with “The WBS Man.” He is listed as their evangelist, based at their congregation, but they have little or no say in his activities. They cannot fire him because they did not hire him.

Many years ago, a passing American anointed him “The WBS Man.” American funds seemed to enthrone him above his congregation and his elders. Recently the elders and deacons pressed him, as their evangelist, for transparency and accountability in his dealings. In response he assembled his royal court of beneficiaries. That august council issued a decree affirming his sovereign right to ignore his shepherds.

On cue, I stumble into this scene of conflict, easily mistaken for another “passing American,” and claiming WBS ties. No wonder the local leaders have misgivings!

A visit with one elder convinces him that I am not the enemy. In the full meeting with the elders and deacons, they marvel to learn how WBS really works. They have never known that they, as members of the Lord’s church, can (and should!) enroll students and do follow-up. A deacon’s son, having grown up in that church, has *never* heard that he can take free courses from America.

Remember, this is the congregation where “The WBS Man” has been based. For years the leaders and members have struggled under the impression that Americans, for reasons unknown, gave WBS to one man as his private and exclusive domain. That impression, mixed with turbulent relations, has smothered the grass-roots involvement that makes WBS so effective.

“The WBS Man” himself seems unfamiliar with WBS’ Master Series, which has been in use for over a decade. That suggests something about a very limited scope for his follow-up. No doubt many have been taught (using older materials), many baptized and, as he shows me, another church started. Having done so much for so little, his supporters and suppliers can afford to enjoy their success... but only from a distance.

Distance has ways of creating mirages. How can reality be distinguished from illusion? Sharpen your focus by getting closer. Make that visit you have long needed to make. Arrange for closer supervision. Build harmony with local leaders and members. Use WBS in ways that promote all believers as royal priests and, above all, Christ *alone* as king.