

Wealth Transfer

Provisioning the Harvest

James E. Saunders

New World Ventures
PO Box 233
Bixby, OK 74008 U.S.A.

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Preface

We are living in a moment of destiny.

Never before has so much faith and vision been generated in the interest of bringing closure to the Great Commission. As a result, a great vacuum of provision has evolved in the wake of this focus on completing the harvest.

History reveals that when God's Kingdom is being established in the earth, transfer of wealth has always gone with it. When Jacob departed from his father-in-law, he had amassed so much wealth Laban was provoked to jealousy. Why had Jacob become so wealthy? He had to have the "seed" for the beginning of an entire nation. Likewise, when God brought the nation of Israel out of Egypt He did so with nearly all of Egypt's wealth. Overnight, slaves became a mighty nation owing no man anything. The kings Cyrus and Darius transferred great portions of their wealth to assist in rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. In the New Testament, we see Joseph and Mary being lavished with wealth for the Christ child by the Magi from the East. Here provision was made for the rearing of Jesus in Egypt while the family was in exile. These are only a few examples of wealth transferred into faithful hands for the establishment of God's Kingdom.

I believe we are living at the moment of another great wealth transfer. This one, however, will be to usher in the greatest harvest of souls for the kingdom the world has ever known.

Introduction

Having been a career missionary for the majority of my adult life, I have had the opportunity of working within several nations. In 1996, God challenged the foundations of everything I knew concerning world missions.

The Lord spoke to my heart "I want you to educate yourself concerning the harvest." My immediate thought was "Lord, do you know who You're talking to? I am Mr. Missionary! I have traveled, seen and worked in more of the world than most would in a lifetime." Patiently the Lord revealed my ignorance to me, asking, "Son, what part of the world has never heard the Gospel? What groups of people are in those regions? Who is reaching out to them? Which organizations and what are their strategies?"

I was dumbfounded! All these years of work in God's harvest fields yet I could not answer those simple questions. Humbly I admitted my ignorance to the Lord and set out to broaden my understanding.

From the very beginning of my journey, I felt a strong sense of destiny in my pursuit of knowledge and truth concerning the harvest. A lifetime of direction has come out of that period of my life as well as many insights, which have led to understanding the failure of old strategies and helped with the development of new ones. One such insight was the reason for writing this book.

Looking back over the years, I have known numerous missionaries. Many who are on the cutting edge of global evangelism – taking the Gospel into regions where they have never heard the name of Jesus. Among those individuals ran a common thread. Almost without exception, each one was in severe lack of resources.

In the past, as I have met and worked alongside these saints, I considered this growing need was a result of their position. I had an "it comes with the territory" point of view. However, in recent times, as I have taken assessment of these missionaries, I feel compelled to consider something deeper. Is God's will for those in the most strategic roles of bringing closure to the Great Commission to have the least resources with which to do that primary task?

In Matthew 24:14 Jesus states, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." (NIV)

Could it be that another overriding factor is deterring those taking the gospel to all nations? Let's look at some statistics that shed a great deal of light on these questions.

- Of all missionaries going to cross-cultural fields, only 2% end up in regions with no Gospel witness.

- Of all wealth focused toward Global evangelism, only about 1% goes to regions that have no way of hearing about the Gospel.

When we consider this, a very clear picture emerges from the haze.

A conspiracy of supernatural proportions is taking place before our eyes! Only one force could possibly be behind this kind of opposition. Satan, who knows that only the completion of the Great Commission will end his reign, will do ANYTHING he can to stop the Gospel from advancing into areas of the Earth that have not yet heard.

What can our enemy do to hinder the spread of the Gospel? Can he stop the anointing or call on individual's lives? No! Then, what else would have the greatest effect of thwarting those on the front lines? You have probably guessed by now – lack of money! We must understand that the same tool Satan uses to cause men to bow their knee to him in the last days, is the very mechanism he has used for two millenniums to deter the closure of the Great Commission! What is going to change this? A deeper revelation of God's wealth and how he brings it to the hands of those who are spreading the Gospel to the final frontier.

Stewardship

Even after so much teaching on prosperity in our generation, we really have not yet understood the principles of abundance. We have had teaching on sowing and reaping; but do we really understand? Are we prepared for the great transfer of the wealth of the earth into our hands to promote the Gospel? Scripture contains a sobering warning.

1 Timothy 6:5-11

... men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain. But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.

People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. (NIV)

Prosperity vs. stewardship

How do we reconcile this passage with prosperity teaching? Basically we are instructed not to desire to be rich and that, if we are chasing after money, we are pursuing the wrong thing. How is God going to use us as channels for transferring wealth into His work if He is saying, "Don't desire to become rich"? I tripped on that one too! Let's look to the book of Mark for an answer.

Mark 10:17-30

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'"

"Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."

Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?"

Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God".

Peter said to him, "We have left everything to follow you!"

"I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the Gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields — and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. (NIV)

To paraphrase, Jesus is walking down the road when this man comes up and kneels in His way and starts to flatter Him. The man says, "Oh good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus looks at the young man, pauses for a second, and then says, "Why are you calling me good?" In other words, "Why are you trying to flatter me?" Jesus continues, "You know the commandments," as if to say, "You're a good Jew. Why do I have to tell you? Don't murder. Don't steal. Don't commit adultery...."

I can just imagine the young man getting up off his knees as Jesus continues on His way. Jesus was passing time with him as if to say, "Don't con me". The man follows along, however, and says, "I've done all those things from my youth, but I know I still lack something". Jesus stopped at this point. He got interested for the first time

because He was hearing the man's heart. He looked at him with compassion and said, "There is one thing that you lack. Go sell everything you have, give it to the poor, and come and follow me." The Gospel of Mark says that the young man went away dejected and downcast. And Jesus goes on to say, "It's hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven."

If it is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven, why is God preparing to transfer this massive wealth into our hands in order to advance the Gospel?

As the story continues, the disciples were astonished, saying, "Well, who in the world is going to be saved then?" Jesus responds, "With God, all things are possible." Then Peter speaks up and says, "We left everything to follow you. What's in it for us?" Peter just cuts right to the bottom line. Jesus replies, "No one has left anything in this age for me or the Gospel's sake who won't receive 100 times as much in this life (along with persecutions), and in the age to come, eternal life."

The opportunity of a lifetime

Jesus was giving this young man the opportunity of a lifetime. He was giving the rich young ruler the opportunity to move to a point of far greater wealth. Now you ask, "How in the world is he going to do that by giving everything away?" The answer can be found in Proverbs.

Proverbs 11:24

One man gives freely, yet gains even more. (NIV)

Jesus was trying to move the rich young ruler from a point of ownership to a point of stewardship. Through stewardship, God could move far more wealth through his hands than what he could personally own at any given time. How do we know that? Because the passage goes on to say that we will not give up anything that we will not receive back one hundred fold in this life.

The opportunity of a lifetime that Jesus offered this man was that he could remove in an instant the one and only thing keeping him from God's will. He could have moved from total ownership to complete stewardship in one move. What an opportunity! Normally in our lives, stewardship develops a piece at a time. We say, "OK Lord, I'll surrender this. I'll become a steward in this area," and He begins to move through our lives afresh in those areas.

All we have to do is look at our own lives to see how true this is. In reality, not one thing we have is actually ours to own – not even our bodies or our lives. Our bodies are to be a living sacrifice and our lives were bought with the blood of Christ at the

cross. Most of the time our attitude is: God made me steward over this portion and over this portion, I am owner. Isn't that the way we usually view the *things* in our life?

God is trying to move us to a point where He can freely flow all of His blessings (wealth) through us, as we become stewards over everything in our lives.

Ownership vs. Stewardship

The ownership part of our life is blocking the divine flow. A friend once dreamed that he was up on a high place and he felt as if his whole being were a conduit. He could see smaller pipes branching off from the conduit (his life) and connecting to other people as far as he could see. As the blessings flowed through him, he could see other people being watered and springing to life (becoming productive, bearing fruit). When he tried to hold on to the blessings (to own them for himself), the flow became obstructed, and the others began to dry up because of what he was doing within himself. He was blocking the flow by claiming ownership of the blessings.

So how can we identify the blockage? When the blessings of God flow through our lives and we think, "I own that" or "I need to hold on to this; I might not get any more," a blockage is created in our lives. As the flow is stopped, those that are being watered or blessed through our lives begin to suffer need.

In the realm of the spirit, one of the most tragic things that I have witnessed in the lives of anointed men and women of God is when they mistakenly think they own the anointing. This leads to fruitlessness and possibly destruction. In any other situation, they may have been just another face in the crowd. No one would have ever paid attention to them. They could have lived and died, and few would have ever listened to much of what they had to say. But because God deposited an anointing into their lives they drew a following and gained prestige and wealth that they would never have had otherwise. In the midst of their success, the temptation to take control of the anointing presented itself. And they like the rich young ruler considered themselves owners not stewards.

God does not remove the anointing. But those who are not stewards will not experience a continual growth in ministry.

Romans 11:29

... for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. (NIV)

We find this same principle illustrated in the parable about the unjust steward (Luke 16:1-13). The rich man accused the manager of wasting his possessions. When he was

called in to face the accusations and was fired, the steward reduced the accounts of his master's debtors in order to gain favor with them for himself.

What was the steward's problem? He didn't see himself as a steward. He saw himself as the owner. Had he seen himself in the proper light, he would not have been squandering his master's possessions. At some point he began thinking of himself as the owner of the things he was entrusted to manage and he had that attitude when dealing with his master's business associates. When this man developed a real problem he thinks to himself, "I am going to lose my job and position. I am too lazy to dig and too proud to beg." Calling in the people who owed his master something he said to them, "Sit down and tell me what you owe my master". They said, "Well, so many bushels of grain, oil or other commodities." At this, he began to reduce their bill, saying, "You pay this much and I'll cancel the rest of the debt".

The remainder of this scripture perplexed me for years because Jesus was basically commending the actions of this man. Luke 16:8 records Jesus saying,

"And his master praised the unrighteous steward because he had acted shrewdly. For the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light." (NIV)

In other words, the businessmen of this world are wiser than Christians. That really bothered me, so I began to analyze this parable. Why was this unrighteous steward commended, even in his craftiness? First of all, for the very first time he recognized his real position. He did not see himself as owner anymore. This man had the position of steward but was dealing with people as if he were owner. He finally saw himself in the accurate light as a steward. Secondly, he began to do something to help someone beyond himself, even if out of stealth and craftiness.

The moral to this story is in Luke 16:9: "I say to you, make friends for yourself by the means of mammon of unrighteousness that when it fails they may receive you into eternal dwellings." In other words, do something eternal with earthly wealth. Remember, I Timothy 6:7 tells us that we came into this world with nothing and we are going out with nothing. If we consider ourselves stewards over everything we have or everything that flows through our lives, we have done well. *By being stewards, we act, not as owners, but as caretakers of blessings to be passed along to others.*

The things that count for eternity are the only worthwhile things that we can do in this life. Since we cannot take any earthly wealth with us beyond this life, we are simply stewards over that which we have been given on this earth. As stewards, we must be faithful to convert those things into something eternal by blessing those in need.

Even though Jesus never took up a monetary offering for funding His ministry on earth, He did endorse a type of offering. What was this offering? He required the giving of our lives – all areas of our lives. Often the possessions to which our hearts cling most dearly are the things God requires us to yield to Him. He wants to have first place in our hearts. If there are areas where we view ourselves as owners, we will never know true abundance because ownership blocks the flow of God's blessing. Whenever this change of heart takes place in us, we will begin to experience true abundance in new dimensions.

The prerequisites of stewardship

Luke 16:10

He who is faithful in a very little thing, is faithful also in much. He who is unrighteous in a very little thing, is unrighteous also in much. If, therefore, you've never been faithful in the use of unrighteous mammon (or in other words, earthly goods, earthly wealth), who will trust you in the true riches? (NIV)

How is God going to loose the blessings if we are not faithful in the little things?

Do you know why we see wealth ruin good Christian people? They do not see themselves as stewards. They see themselves as owners. When viewing things in our possession, our human nature makes us think, "I need to hold on to this." We must understand that this kind of natural thinking is contrary to God's way of thinking — just like that rich young ruler, the man who owned much, was kept from advancing the Kingdom because he could not change his perspective. Whenever you read the word "rich," replace it with "owned much". Then you begin to get a proper perspective of ownership versus stewardship.

In II Timothy, the Apostle Paul warns we should not desire to own much. However God wants tremendous wealth to flow through our lives, not as owners, but as stewards. Anything that we have between birth and death is just something that we are using. We cannot own these things because we certainly cannot take them with us. We are stewards of them. If we are not faithful in the use of earthly wealth, how can He entrust to us the true wealth of spiritual blessings?

Luke 16:12-13

12. And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own? (NKJ)

13. No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. (earthly wealth). (KJV)

You cannot be a servant of God and a servant of wealth. Who was more wealthy – Solomon or Joseph? Using the wisdom of God in his life, Joseph brought all the wealth of the known world to the coffers of Egypt, and he was the steward over all of those resources. The people of other lands were coming into Egypt to sell themselves as slaves because they did not have anything else to trade for food. I believe that particularly in God's eyes Joseph was far wealthier than Solomon was. Why? Joseph was a steward. What happened to Solomon and his wealth? The Book of Ecclesiastes is in the Bible for a reason. From it, we learn what happens when we see ourselves as owners in this life instead of stewards. Solomon came to the point where his possessions were rotting his very soul. Basically, he said, "I haven't withheld any pleasure from myself. I've owned as much as I wanted. I've given myself as much as I possibly could, and I'm just disgusted with the whole mess." Why? Solomon was an owner and not a steward. He was the wisest man on earth, yet he missed the concept of stewardship. He owned far more than any other man at that time, and probably more than any other man in history. Silver was heaped up into mountains because it was so common. Can you imagine? Even Solomon could not serve two masters, and in the end, his choice left him empty and bitter.

Who owns whom?

Matthew 16:25-26

For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? (NIV)

If we want to understand how to abound, the key is stewardship, total stewardship, not seeing ourselves as owner of anything. As a young Christian if there was something in my life that was difficult to give up, I knew it had a hold on me. So I would realign my priorities and make sure God had first place in everything.

Jesus required a great deal from His followers. To the multitudes He issued the challenge "if you love (family) more than me, you are not worthy to follow me." Other "would-be" disciples were told that they would have to leave a life of comfort and have no place to lay their head. One was told to let others bury his father. Yet to another, to not even return to his family, to bid them good-bye. The rich young ruler was given the ultimatum to sell all he owned. At that time, Peter spoke on behalf of the twelve and confessed that they had given up everything to follow Jesus.

Whether material possessions or relationships, God requires us to be stewards. In order to increase, we have to make the change in our heart. When we clear out the areas in our lives that are blocking the flow, then God can begin to loose His abundant blessings so that we can advance His Kingdom.

If we embrace the ways of stewardship, God will open the floodgates of heaven and liberally pour His blessings through our lives to water the nations.

The Coin of the Realm

Several years ago I learned an invaluable lesson in ministry. For nearly a decade, we had been serving the nations of the world, distributing Christian relief by ship with very little exchange of currency. Over the years, the Lord had enabled us to refurbish and put three vessels to sea for His work. Once when we were in the beginning stages of rebuilding a donated ship, we were approached about receiving a large sum of money to be used to complete repairs and put the ship into service. When asked if I thought we could accomplish our goal for the offered sum of money, I replied, "Are you joking? For that kind of money we could be water skiing behind this ship." We had been rebuilding these ships with hardly any money. I was certain with a donation of this size we could do far more than we had in the past.

Rebuilding the ship that next year was like struggling in quicksand. Everything seemed to go wrong, and all of the problems cost money. Money poured from every pocket until it was almost gone. As I assessed the situation, the repairs on the vessel had progressed very little and yet we had spent so much money. What had happened? As I sought God for answers, I found that the large sum of money we had received was given out of strife. The organization that had given it was in the process of being sued by another division of their company. Before their bank accounts were frozen in the legal proceedings, they had decided to empty their accounts to spite the parent company. The Lord revealed to me that the money was not given in faith at all. You might be thinking right now, "What does faith have to do with it?" When you are advancing God's Kingdom ... everything!

The currency of the Kingdom

Have you ever wondered how some ministries can have such large operating expenses and yet seem to do so little to reach the lost? The answer we are looking for is in the book of Mark.

Mark 12:41-44

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth, but she, out of her poverty, put in everything — all she had to live on." (NIV)

Jesus called for the disciples' attention, as if to say, "Come here guys! Did you see that?" The disciples were probably wondering at that point how much money had been dropped in the offering by one of the wealthy people. But Jesus was marveling over the halfpenny that a poor little old lady had given. How differently the eyes of the spirit perceive and comprehend things! The Lord told the disciples that what this woman had given amounted to more than the multitude and all of the wealthy people had given out of their abundance combined. How could this be? One half of a cent compared to untold thousands! I'll tell you how – that lady put faith in the offering! Everyone else was either giving out of obligation or to be seen by men.

Hebrews 11:6 says that without faith it is impossible to please God; and I might add, *without faith it is impossible to advance a spiritual kingdom*. Earthly wealth alone will never do it, no matter what form it is in. Faith is the only currency that can advance God's kingdom.

Many times we anticipate needing one thing or the other to advance the vision God has given us to accomplish. We may think we need prayer support, yet if there is no faith behind these prayers they will do nothing. Some want laborers to assist them. However, if the laborers who come to help were called of God to give or pray instead of coming to physically help, then no faith is behind their action. These people will probably hinder more than help. Additionally, currency alone will not advance the Kingdom of God.

A journey of faith

Let's look at how God led his chosen people on a journey of faith that took them out of Egypt:

Exodus 3:21-22

"And I will make the Egyptians favorably disposed toward this people, so that when you leave you will not go empty-handed. Every woman is to ask her neighbor and any woman living in her house for articles of silver and gold and for clothing, which you will put on your sons and daughters. And so you will plunder the Egyptians." (NIV)

Exodus 12:35-36

The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. The LORD had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians. (NIV)

I believe it is important to understand the context of this event. Four hundred years prior to Israel's exodus, God ordained Joseph to administrate Egypt's economic affairs.

Genesis 47:14-21

Joseph collected all the money that was to be found in Egypt and Canaan in payment for the grain they were buying, and he brought it to Pharaoh's palace. When the money of the people of Egypt and Canaan was gone, all Egypt came to Joseph and said, "Give us food. Why should we die before your eyes? Our money is used up." "Then bring your livestock," said Joseph. "I will sell you food in exchange for your livestock, since your money is gone." So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and he gave them food in exchange for their horses, their sheep and goats, their cattle and donkeys. And he brought them through that year with food in exchange for all their livestock.

When that year was over, they came to him the following year and said, "We cannot hide from our lord the fact that since our money is gone and our livestock belongs to you, there is nothing left for our lord except our bodies and our land. Why should we perish before your eyes-- we and our land as well? Buy us and our land in exchange for food, and we with our land will be in bondage to Pharaoh. Give us seed so that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become desolate."

So Joseph bought all the land in Egypt for Pharaoh. The Egyptians, one and all, sold their fields, because the famine was too severe for them. The land became Pharaoh's, and Joseph reduced the people to servitude, from one end of Egypt to the other. (NIV)

As stated previously the wealth of the known world was gathered into the treasuries of Egypt. During the reign of Joseph the holdings of the Egyptian Empire escalated to the greatest on earth. In the span of time between Joseph and the exodus, no doubt this power and wealth multiplied more. It was with this wealth that Israel departed from Egypt. God wanted to transfer the wealth and balance of global power to that of His chosen people.

Daniel 4:25

.... the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes." (NIV)

But more importantly, God was retraining His own people. In doing this, He proceeded to lead them into the desert. What were they going to do with that gold and silver in the desert? There was nothing to purchase out there! They had just taken part in the largest wealth transfer possibly in history, yet they could not even buy a loaf of bread with it! Only one thing would feed them and keep them clothed in that wilderness: their trust in a loving Heavenly Father. We call that faith.

All of this was very purposeful. God wanted to establish Himself as provider in their minds and to teach them the secrets of true wealth. As theoretically wealthy as these people were, having tons of gold and silver, Hebrews 3:19 suggests they were poverty stricken. Why? Because of their lack of faith. Their lack of faith kept them from moving from a point of provision to a point of abundance in the promised land because they never learned what true wealth is and where it comes from. Let's back up for a moment and imagine the mentality of the children of the nation of Israel while in the wilderness for 40 years. This was the generation that would actually go into the Promised Land. This was probably the greatest generation gap that has ever existed. Think for a moment. Their parents took part in one of the greatest natural wealth transfers of all time. They had been slaves their whole lives, owning nothing. Then one day by a miracle they had the wealth of the known world. They must have had great hopes and a burning desire to purchase untold possessions and pleasures in the land of promise.

By contrast their children had no comprehension of these things. In their world, food didn't come from owning land and harvesting crops; it was provided by God every morning right outside their tent. Gold and silver weren't needed to buy clothes and shoes because shoes and clothes lasted a lifetime. There was no need to hire someone to dig a well for water. Wherever they went there was a rock out of which flowed all of the fresh water they ever needed. Why would you toil over buying wood to build a fire to keep warm? A pillar of fire warmed the whole community each night. These young people had little understanding of the need to buy and sell. Their world was one where every need was met by God Himself. This was a world with no toil or striving for possessions. God was the source of all sufficiency to them.

In stark contrast there was a restless yearning in their parents that they had little ability to relate to. Why were their parents placing so much value on things that had no relevance to their sustenance? After all, of what value was all this gold and silver their parents so protected?

It had no bearing on adding value to their existence. At whose expense do you think all of that treasure was hauled around the desert? You guessed it, the children. Imagine the burden of all that gold and silver, few things on this planet could be heavier. Think of the scorn these children had for the idiocy of their parents' insisting that all of this useless stuff be hauled wherever they go. On the backs of this new generation was carried a burden that ground into their very soul a deep understanding. An understanding that trust in God was the source of life provision. Additionally an understanding that whatever their parents had perceived as important in life was desperately wrong. God was creating a generation that was solely dependent on Him. A nation separated from worldly perceptions of wealth.

God still desires a people that understand true faith is not measured by earthly treasures. In Hebrews 11, termed by some as the "Faith Hall of Fame", is full of people who lived below their achievable means. The Bible says that all these great men and women of God valued something far greater than earthly wealth and comfort. Their hope for riches was in eternal realms. Having their eyes fixed on this prize, they gladly forfeited the pleasures of this life.

As we enter this twenty first century the desire to amass wealth and possessions is accelerating like never before. It is interesting that Jesus said, "Do not work for food which spoils, but the food that endures to eternal life which the Son of man will give to you." John 6:27 (NIV) He also said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Matthew 6:21 (NIV)

These kingdom principles are opposite of those emphasized by the world. There is an odd thing about things we work for..... it is harder to let go of them or to pass them on. Could this be why Jesus said seek God's Kingdom above all, and the rest He will give to us? (Matt. 6:33)

I believe this is the reason the Levites were given no ownership of property. Having no ownership didn't keep them from God's blessing. On the contrary, the Levites received the best from all the land, yet the only thing they worked for was God's Kingdom. We also see that use without the burden of ownership is God's highest notion of prosperity. For example when the children of Israel were about to enter the land of promise, God said they would reap harvests they didn't have to plant, and live in houses they didn't work to build. (See Deuteronomy 6:10-11)

In reality we are only using anything in this life. Job 1:21 says you come into this world with nothing and you will leave with nothing. We must endeavor to align our priorities as did the generations that have gone before us and learn the secret of the coin of the realm.... Faith!

Currency is not Wealth

True temporal wealth by Biblical definition is the fruit of the earth. Currency only theoretically represents wealth. Indirectly Satan has always used "unrighteous mammon" to gain control of men's lives. The Bible even describes in the Book of Revelation how in the culmination of time this control through currency exchange will become a blatant plot to cause all men to bow in worship to Satan. In fact, coined money was never mentioned in the Word of God in association with God prospering

even one of his children. The contrast between true wealth and currency can best be seen by looking outside of the Western world.

Developing nations, by their systems of currency, have been made to believe that they are poor. Actually, currency is controlled by politics and that allows men to regulate the flow of wealth in a nation. Through currency, an imaginary poverty has been developed in many nations, and the citizens have been mistakenly convinced they are impoverished. All the while, these nations are wealthy in resources that God has strategically placed there to sustain that nation's populace and to fund the propagation of the Gospel in and from that nation. If you ask the average person in one of these nations if they reside in a wealthy country, they will think you are being foolish. In truth, wealth surrounds them all the time. This is the problem; they have been trained *not* to recognize wealth. Some of what Westerners term as "third world" nations are actually some of the wealthiest nations on earth. This fact can be clearly seen by the events that have taken place in many of these nations.

Let us examine an all too common cycle that is typical in a number of countries today:

- 1. Businessmen from a first world nation move into a third world nation and begin to exploit its resources.**
- 2. That nation's leaders allow the development of these resources by foreign businessmen in exchange for personal gain.**
- 3. Few, if any, of these revenues are ever re-invested in the nation's infrastructure, but instead are shifted out of the country to the personal bank accounts of these leaders.**
- 4. The third world nation begins to deplete the resources that God placed there for that nation. Since the revenues are sent out of the country, this wealth is distributed to only a select few within the nation.**
- 5. Thus, the wealth of the nation is kept out of circulation, keeping the majority in poverty, and keeping labor prices low.**
- 6. The low labor prices keep the foreign business people coming back because of the larger profit margins.**
- 7. The nation's populace reaches the point where it can no longer bear this crushing burden of politically induced poverty, and revolts.**
- 8. War breaks out and ravages what is left of the nation's infrastructure and decency.**
- 9. All external financial aid and investment are cut off from the nation during this turmoil.**
- 10. The foreign business people wait on the sidelines for peace to return.**
- 11. A new leader comes to power by virtue of might.**

12. The patiently waiting foreign business people immediately approach this new leader.

13. New deals are struck.

14. The raping of the nation's resources begins again, and the cycle continues.

Ultimately, while all this is happening, the wealth of God-given natural resources surrounds these poor victims, but they are fooled into thinking that wealth is equated with their wildly deflating currency! The truth is, the currency is the problem. Incredibly most of those from first-world nations also mistakenly believe that their currencies are somehow invincible.

Man's currency vs. God's prosperity

The contrast is quite clear. Man's currencies are designed to control lives and the flow of God's wealth. God's prosperity, on the other hand, liberates those who are blessed with it.

Perhaps the best illustration of this point is found in the following example.

Mark 6:36-40

[Jesus' disciples said to Him,] "Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." But He answered, "You give them something to eat." They said to Him, "That would take eight months of a man's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?" "How many loaves do you have?" He asked. "Go and see." When they found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. (NIV)

When Jesus challenged the disciples to feed the multitude, what was their first thought in this situation? They asked, "How much money is this going to take?" Does this sound a little like us? Jesus, however, revealed the Kingdom perspective. His first thought was finding a seed (the loaves and fish). Money was the limiting factor in the disciples' minds concerning ministry, just as it is in ours. God's wealth, though, has no limits, and the multitude was fed with merely a morsel for a seed. In reality, a group of any size could have been fed by this principle. Our God is a God of More Than Enough!

Let us continue to look further in the Scriptures.

Luke 20:21-25

So the spies questioned Him: "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" He saw through their duplicity and said to them, "Show me a

denarius. Whose portrait and inscription are on it?" "Caesar's," they replied. He said to them, "Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." (NIV)

Here we see Jesus confronted with the issue of taxation to a government system that the Jews abhorred, a government that blatantly worshipped its leader, Caesar. Luke reveals one of the most graphic displays of Jesus' perspective on currency. First Jesus, when asking to see the coin used to pay the tax, pretended to not even recognize it, asking, "Whose likeness and inscription is on this?" When the crowd responded "Caesar," Jesus replied, "If it is Caesar's, then give it back to him, but give to God what belongs to Him."

Make no mistake when reading this passage. Jesus was telling everyone a crucial fact in a profoundly simple and clear way: we operate within the borders of these kingdoms ruled by men. Appease them with what they think they are due. However, God's Kingdom does not function within those bounds. God is neither limited nor held back by them, nor do they regulate God's wealth. Jesus, in effect, was displaying for all to see and hear that he did not even recognize this token as being wealth. At the same time, He was presenting the two concepts of wealth as worlds apart. Notice that Caesar did not end up in God's category.

The source of true wealth

We must not lose sight of the fact that all true wealth originates from the earth, and our Heavenly Father placed it here for us. When discussing wealth, we must also understand that none of the wealth God has placed on the earth has ever physically left.

1 Timothy 6:7

For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. (NIV)

All circulated wealth since the beginning of time has and continues only to change hands. The remainder is yet to be utilized, and, I might add, the remainder is by far the greatest portion.

Romans 8:19-22

For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. (NKJ)

The earth groans and awaits the manifestation of the children of God. This Scripture states that the earth was subjected and exploited for ungodly use. I believe this

passage implies that the creation has understanding and even feelings. The earth has sparingly yielded up its resources to be consumed on men's sin and greed. On the other hand, this passage is telling us that creation rejoices for the moment you and I will arrive on the scene! Creation is waiting to yield its resources so that we may advance God's Kingdom in the earth.

I believe the untapped resources of the earth, which have been withheld for God's purposes in the earth, far exceed those that the creation has sparingly yielded up for unbelieving men to exploit for their own sinful purposes. For this reason, it appears that many of these resources are nearly expended. Creation is ceasing to yield for the unrighteous and is reserving itself for the Godly who are receiving the revelations of God's wealth even the ones contained in this book.

Continuing through the scriptures we see, in the book of Matthew, a comical portrayal of the fact that all wealth originates from the resources of the earth.

Matthew 17:24-27

After Jesus and His disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax came to Peter and asked, "Doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax?" "Yes, He does," he replied. When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. "What do you think, Simon?" he asked. "From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes — from their own sons or from others?" "From others," Peter answered. "Then the sons are exempt," Jesus said to him. "But so that we may not offend them, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours." (NIV)

Here we see Jesus confronted with another taxation issue. Jesus obviously had not been concerned with paying the tax up to this time. His desire however, was not to give them any reason to stumble over His actions, and thereby close their minds to the truth He had to offer them. Peter was told to do something seemingly ridiculous: get the tax money out of a fish's mouth. I can hardly wait to get to heaven to find out if Peter checked the fish's mouth again to see if there was any extra change!

Why this entire ordeal over a coin for taxes? Jesus wanted to demonstrate to Peter as well as to us that all wealth originates from the creation and that is where we need to see the source.

Looking further in scripture we find that Proverbs 27 tells us to look after our flocks and fields because that is what will feed us in the day our currency and standing in society fails us.

Proverbs 27:23-27

Be sure you know the condition of your flocks; give careful attention to your herds; for riches do not endure forever, and a crown is not secure for all generations. When the hay is removed and new growth appears and the grass from the hills is gathered in, the lambs will provide you with clothing, and the goats with the price of a field. You will have plenty of goat's milk to feed you and your family and to nourish your servant girls. (NIV)

Many of the economists of our day have totally lost sight of what true wealth is. A recent report from the European Union states that countries, which rely on agriculture production for their national income, are being encouraged to shift training their young students to information-based jobs with computers. I wonder what the European Union intends for its New World Order to eat? Phantom ones and zeros kept on a failing global computer system?

Clearly, the Biblical perspective of wealth is very different from our contemporary understanding. God desires us to comprehend the principles of His Kingdom, and with this knowledge, the resources stored up in the earth for this hour will be unlocked. The following chapters will give us the insights we need to comprehend these principles.

Divine Transfer

The fourth dimension

Einstein theorized that another dimension paralleled the three dimensions we consider the physical realm. He called it the fourth dimension. This fourth dimension was thought to occupy the same space as the other three yet remain undetected by our natural senses. He also theorized that there were passages into this fourth dimension in space called black holes. Einstein never lived to prove his theory of a fourth dimension or black holes in space. Today we know that there are, in fact, observances in the universe that we believe to be black holes. Scientifically, however, the existence of a dimension beyond these three has never been proven.

Regardless of scientific proof, Einstein was correct in his hypothesis of a fourth dimension. The entrance to it, however, is not a black hole in space. Jesus spoke of this dimension. He called it the "realm of the spirit", and it does, in fact, occupy the same time and space as the three dimensions we can sense.

The word of God plainly states in II Corinthians 4:18,

For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. (NIV)

The realm we relate to as the natural realm has its founding on things more substantial. The Scriptures tell us in the book of Hebrews,

By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. (Hebrews 11:3 NIV)

The Son is the radiance of God's glory ... sustaining all things by his powerful word. (Hebrews 1:3 NIV)

In other words, there is another realm — which is more substantial — by which this entire physical realm was conceived and came into being. That realm of the spirit, although not observed by the physical senses, occupies not only the same time and space, but is eternal.

Access to the spirit realm

In the book of John Jesus speaks with Nicodemus, a Jewish ruler, concerning the co-existence of the spirit realm and how to gain access to it.

John 3:1-10

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."

In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

"How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

"How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

"You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things?" (NIV)

This seemingly simplistic discourse on the realm of the spirit actually contains some deep truths of its inner workings.

First, one cannot see into this realm unless born into it: **"Jesus declared, 'I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again'" (John 3:3 NIV).**

Next, these two realms are far removed from each other. In fact, what is birthed in one remains in that realm and, of itself, has no way to pass into the realm of the other: **"Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit" (John 3:6 NIV).**

Jesus continues to expound on this subject, teaching us that even as we see the *effects* of the realm of the spirit, we do not physically see the realm itself. He compares it to the wind, whose effects we experience although it is not seen. In fact, the analogy was carefully and aptly made. The forces of wind are one of nature's greatest elements, causing great benefit and at times catastrophe — all the while unseen. The Holy Spirit was portrayed as coming with a mighty wind on the day of Pentecost. Could it be that Nicodemus was one of the 120 in the upper room praying when the spirit was poured out?

Passage between the two realms

In the previous verses, Jesus also reveals the role of the doorway by which information, ideas, and concepts may pass from one realm to the other.

The doorway into this realm is the regenerated triune man.

Ephesians 2:6 explains that at this "New Birth" people are born into the realm of God's spiritual kingdom and are seated with Christ in heavenly places:

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. (NIV)

This verse brings to light a profound truth: we, being born into the realm of God's Spirit, are the only creatures on earth which are able to occupy both realms at once!

Again John 3:6 states, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit". Or one could say that whatever is born of Spirit remains in the realm of the spirit, and whatever is born of the flesh remains in the realm of the flesh. A born-again person, however, spans both realms at once! This truth reveals the crucial nature of man's role on earth. *Christians are the agents by which things that are birthed in the realm of the spirit – God's Kingdom – have passage into the realm of the natural!*

Dynamics of the divine transfer

In examining the dynamics of this divine transfer, we realize that in Matthew 6:9-10 Jesus was asked by the disciples to teach them his secrets of prayer.

"This, then, is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." (NIV)

In this passage Christ teaches that we are to pray that God's will be done on earth. Often Christians think the will of God *will* be done regardless of what they pray. However, the instruction is very clear, and certainly Jesus would not have taught us to pray in vain. We are to pray the manifestation of God's will on the earth. Again, Jesus tells us,

"Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Matt 16:19 NIV)

God, by divine order, has placed the born again believer in a critical juncture. We are to perceive God's will by His Spirit that dwells in us.

John 16:13

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. (NIV)

Then, after perceiving the things birthed in the realm of the spirit, faith is combined with them in the human spirit. When faith is combined with those "seeds" from God's Spirit, they are spoken out into the natural realm through prayer. What a wonderful cycle — and what an incredible responsibility!

Years ago during a season of prayer I had something happen that gave a glimpse into the inter-workings of the spirit realm. During those evenings, I would go to a small church and pray. I was strangely drawn to the nation of India on the world map that hung in the sanctuary. I found it a little curious that I would be so drawn to a land I had never been, and of which I knew so little. Three days this continued, and on the third evening I began to pour out my heart in prayer specifically for the city of Bombay. Sometime later, I was receiving a guest minister whom I had never met. As we traveled from the airport to the church, one hour away, he began to relate to me that he had recently ministered in India and had experienced a miracle breakthrough. To my surprise, the city where this took place was Bombay. As I carefully questioned him about the date of his breakthrough I realized that it was the exact time and days when I had been praying for that region of the world.

Imagine, human beings standing at the juncture of two dimensions, providing entrance for God's divine will to enter the Earth.

The passage flows both ways

The believer not only has the ability to be the doorway from the spirit to the natural, but also from the natural to the spirit realm. We are the only beings that possess the ability to take that which is temporal and convert it to eternal. Jesus highlighted this concept in the following parable.

Luke 16:1-13

Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.'

"The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg — I know what I'll do so that when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.'

"So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' 'Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,' he replied. The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.' Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?' 'A thousand bushels of wheat,' he replied. He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.'

"The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.

"I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?"

"No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." (NIV)

It is interesting that Jesus commends the seemingly unrighteous deed of this individual. As we study this passage more closely, we learn in verses 8 and 9 that people use natural wealth to gain favor and create strong personal relationships. Jesus' point was if the world can wisely use natural wealth for their benefit, how much more should God's children use earthly wealth for the advancement of His Kingdom. This is a shocking insight. *When we take earthly wealth and help someone in need, the temporal wealth of this world becomes eternal in value.*

Let me illustrate this point. Years ago as a young believer I sat in a car watching a crippled person cross a parking lot. In the agonizingly long time it took for this dear soul to traverse this distance, I began to talk to the Lord in my heart. "Lord, I know I can do the natural things to help people, like feeding them and clothing them, but I yearn to do the supernatural also." The Lord spoke very clearly to my heart. He said,

"Son, to me the supernatural is the natural and the natural is supernatural". Through this, God was saying that He does not view miracles as being out of the ordinary, yet an act of love shown toward another human being in the form of food or clothing is supernatural or spiritual to God. Those acts bring God's Spirit on the scene because God is Love.

This revelation can be a life-changing concept for those called to harness the wealth of the earth to fund the harvest of souls in the earth! Having the wisdom, insight, and ability from God to take charge of the earth's resources, they can direct those resources into God's Kingdom to the degree that no other group of people on earth can. These individuals *not only have the right, but also the responsibility to take that which is temporal and convert it into the eternal.*

The Covenant of Reciprocity

If Jesus modeled how to conduct our individual Christian lives, did He also demonstrate the way to accomplish ministry? I think we would all answer a resounding yes. Do we follow that example? If we say yes, then why did Jesus never take up offerings for His ministry needs?

Perhaps you need a little time to absorb that one. The fact is Jesus did receive; but He never took, He always gave. This was the nature of our Heavenly Father manifest among men through His son. Because of the divine flow of life and blessing emanating from Jesus into the lives of others, a reciprocal reaction was taking place. I believe Jesus purposely defied tradition in this area as abruptly as He overturned the tables of those that bought and sold in the temple. How? Instead of receiving an offering from His largest audiences, He actually gave to them. We see this when he multiplied the loaves and fishes to provide for the multitudes.

The secret to provision

What was his secret of provision? Jesus never had to take up an offering to meet His monetary needs because of what I call "the covenant of reciprocity". Jesus had an unspoken covenant of mutual blessing with those who followed Him.

Luke 8:1-10

After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These

women were helping to support them out of their own means. While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable:

"A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown."

When he said this, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." His disciples asked him what this parable meant. He said, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, "though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand'." (NIV)

In verses 1-3, we learn that the women who followed Him and supported Him out of their means were an integral part of that ministering team. Yes, I said an integral part. The proof is in Mark 4:10 which refers to the same event.

Mark 4:10

But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parable. (NKJ)

When Jesus referred to those "insiders" privileged to have the secrets of the Kingdom clearly explained, was He speaking only to the twelve disciples? No, Mark says "those around Him with the twelve". Those same women who provided for Him financially were also there.

How was this relationship established? Did Jesus go about soliciting ministry supporters? No. Jesus first ministered to them, speaking into their lives that which was of greater value than anything monetary. As a natural result of His spiritual deposit into their lives, those ladies sowed back temporal goods into the ministry that had so blessed them. Herein is the secret to the covenant of reciprocity.

The concept presented here is one born of relationship. By its very definition, relationship means both time and resources are invested on behalf of another. At the very heart of relationship is interdependence. God's pattern from the beginning of creation was not individualism, but relationship. Genesis 2:18 states:

And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. (KJV)

Conversely, we often had more faith and dependency in our traditions, marketing consultants, and strategies of fund raising than in the foundational principle that Jesus modeled.

In Luke, we see Jesus sending the disciples out in order to further train them in taking over the ministry He began. He commissioned them to preach the Gospel and do the works that He had done. Along with that came one more bit of instruction:

.... Take no means of support with you!

Luke 9:1-4

When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. He told them: "Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town." (NIV)

What lesson was the Master Teacher trying to convey? I believe two concepts. First, they could walk in the same power, authority, and anointing that He did. Second, Jesus was teaching them that provisional ministry was not a personal phenomenon associated only with being the Christ. What does this mean for us today? Jesus wanted His followers, then and now, to learn that as we sow spiritual blessings into lives, God, in turn, naturally joins to us those who will meet our temporal needs. The apostle Paul understood this as evidenced by his statement in 1 Corinthians 9:11.

1 Corinthians 9:11

If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? (NKJ)

In other words, if I have sown into you that which is spiritual, do I not have the right to reap that, which is natural? Paul was not just associated with the believers at Corinth; he had fathered them spiritually. This is covenant relationship. Have we misunderstood this dynamic in the body of Christ? Let's ponder the message of the following scripture:

Ephesians 4:16

From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work. (NIV)

This concept is the heart of the covenant of reciprocity –, as ministers FIRST sow into someone's spirit temporal rewards will naturally develop from that deposit. It is something deeper than simply giving into ministry work. So much of what is done today is impersonal giving motivated by a simple conviction that it is the right thing to do. The principles outlined in this book are of little use if not coupled with a thorough understanding of the covenant of reciprocity.

Otherwise, this book could be taken as some new and crafty means of extracting money from people in order to fund more ministry ideas. When in fact successful

ministries are all about relationship – relationship between those who go and those who send. This living, dynamic relationship is founded on the basis of liberality born from a heart of gratefulness and a life that has been changed.

Perhaps you are thinking, "But relationship is how ministry is funded". To a degree, most ministries are funded in this way. However, we are missing something deeper.

Let's stop to analyze something. Did Jesus minister to others that had substantial means by which they could have potentially supported his ministry? Certainly he did, great multitudes followed him. On one occasion, they asked him to arbitrate their inherited wealth. Another clear example is the "Rich young ruler".

This young man had the potential of funding Jesus ministry in a large way. What did Jesus tell him to do? "Sell it all and give it to the poor."

The Lord passed up the opportunity to get the young wealthy man to give into his ministry. Christ's concern was for the benefit of the man's soul, not his money.

Furthermore, Jesus was discerning in his relationships. Concerning the rich young ruler, Christ had already identified an air of manipulation in the young man. He had patronized Jesus, making a display bowing and calling Him, "Good Master".

In no way was Jesus going to subject himself to those kinds of devices for the sake of mere money. Jesus, however, relied on those with whom He was in covenant relationship. We see then that in the course of ministry many lives are touched, but not every person with a potential to give will press in to establish a deeper relationship.

An often-misunderstood fact is this; relationships exist on many different planes. If all associations are treated equally, we run the risk of diluting the quality of relationships that are the most meaningful in our lives. If our time and energy are distributed among all, we will lose effectiveness in those relationships that are most important. At times we should stop to consider, is this an association or a relationship?

Where are your efforts going

The world of business has a rule of thumb called the 80/20 principle. This rule states that 20% of your effort produces 80% of your most valuable results. An example may be; 20% of a business' clients produce 80% of its income. Translated into the realm of relationships, this means that we should be pouring the best of our life's energies into only a choice few.

A shortcoming in this area would result in distributing your energy and resources among too many individuals or the wrong ones. We could compare this to a farmer planting a field. When it is time to plant, does he drive down the road throwing his seed out the window into the ditches? Of course not. Even if some of that seed came up, he wouldn't know where to come back and reap the harvest. Instead he carefully prepares a spot with the greatest potential of producing a crop, and there he sows his seed. Does all this mean that some people are unimportant and are not worth our time? No. Every person is important to God. However, each individual has a limit on the time, energy and resources he can divide among others in his or her life. I believe God has ordained a dynamic covenant partnership between those that spread the Gospel through the earth, and those that send by way of provision. For too long we have been doctrinally confused into thinking that the body of Christ is composed of two parts. I am referring to the notion of Ministry and Laity. Because of this idea, ministers have severed themselves from the provision they need to carry out their work. However, God makes no such distinction in the body of Christ. Those who gather this world's wealth in order to win eternal souls, are as anointed and called as those who actually carry the gospel into the Earth to reach those souls.

I Corinthians 12:12

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. (NIV)

Finding our way

Gospel advancement in this area, has suffered for several significant reasons. First, this provisional part of the body of Christ has not been recognized for their anointing. Second, the church has neither acknowledged nor developed this vital office in the body of Christ because of blind neglect. Finally, a great deal of the effectiveness those in provisional roles would have is dulled because of non-strategic projects. These, while absorbing the majority of the church's resources are missing the target of closure to the Great Commission. Often the Body of Christ is made to feel obligated to fund these projects. As a result 90% of the provisional part of the Church's effort is absorbed, while true advancement of the Kingdom goes unheard and under-funded.

Where must we go from here? We can begin by re-adjusting our priorities toward bringing closure to the commission Christ left us with 2000 years ago. Additionally, we must host a revival – no, not in the sense we normally think. This revival will be one of relationship. The office of the provisionary must be renewed by acknowledging and training up those called to provide for God's harvest of souls. Furthermore, those who carry the Gospel must cast off tradition and learn to value the partnership God has ordained between those who go and those who send. This relationship is a critical component in bringing closure to the Great Commission.

Our Greatest Resource

A pastor who was planting a church in Toronto, Canada related an interesting story that echoes the point Jesus made in Luke 16:8.

"... For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light." (NIV)

The Lord stated this in context of relationships and business matters. I have to admit this scripture has challenged my thinking, even bothered me for quite some time.

My pastor friend had launched a booming congregation and had quickly outgrown his facility. While looking for a place larger to meet, he was introduced to a wealthy unsaved businessman. This gentleman had several real estate holdings, one of which was vacant at the top level. A meeting was arranged between the two for viewing the facility. When they arrived at the top floor of the building and stepped into the room, the pastor was nearly breathless. This room was far larger than he had expected, several thousand square feet. Feeling a little over his head, he decided he would waste no more of the businessman's time. Turning to him in an apologetic tone he explained, "I'm sorry, this was far more than I expected. We don't have nearly enough money for something of this size." The businessman turned and looked the preacher straight in the eyes and exclaimed, "You don't understand! Money is nothing. People are everything!" This businessman had the wisdom to look beyond a single sale and see the infinite value in the greatest resource for his business... people!

The changing source of evangelism

Modern missions strategists have realized the only way to effectively bring closure to the Great Commission is to disciple the indigenous people of a nation to reach their own people. Increasingly the cross-cultural missionary is seeing himself as a catalyst for igniting a self-perpetuating flame among the people of a nation. Refocusing on the target cultures themselves, as the power source behind missions, has breathed new life into global evangelization efforts. Today non-western missionaries from developing nations greatly exceed the number of those coming from first world nations. The overwhelming evidence is that, not only are our ideas changing, but also the entire face of world missions.

We have seen the booming success and efficiency of training nationals to become the world's missionary work force. However, our ideas concerning the funding of this missionary force have been much slower to change. It is time we recognize that just as a great deal of the human resources to carry out the Great Commission will come from within that nation, so will the financial resources.

God has strategically placed wealth through natural resources in each nation sufficient to sustain the populace and to propagate the Gospel within that nation. Many Christian ministries, however, continue to look for financing outside of the country in which its work is being done. In some situations, foreign funds have often paralyzed the growth of ministry by creating unhealthy dependencies. Just as foreign mission workers should act as a catalyst, so should "outside" funding sources. Foreign funds, however helpful, are effectively a dead end. Prolonged financial support can rob the indigenous church of initiative and the opportunity to mature from receivers to givers.

Harnessing the Wealth

Recognizing that there is potential in each nation brings us to the question of how to harness that wealth. Looking back at our story about the Jewish businessperson, we learned that he had wisely found the secret to continuing financial success. This gentleman knew that a transaction alone did not equate to prosperity, but the people who created transactions did. In other words, why would we settle for a cup of water when we can have the well? Proverbs 13:22 says the wealth of the wicked is laid up for the righteous. This is a clear reference to the transfer of wealth into the hands of God's people. We understand that this wealth comes into the believer's hand for the divine purpose of demonstrating God's love to the world. (Deuteronomy 8:18.) The question is how will that wealth come into the hands of the righteous? To a great degree, it will come through the system of commerce. The wealth God placed in each nation is assimilated into the nation's economy through commerce. Christian businesspersons, therefore, are the most closely connected with the wealth of a nation as it changes hands. Therefore the work of God in a nation does not necessarily need wealth; it needs the people that know how to get the wealth. The greatest financial resources in the body of Christ are the businesspersons that have given themselves to funding the work of God in their nation.

Many businesspersons are called and anointed of God to operate in the financial realm for the sake of the Kingdom of God. These persons have the divine ability and knowledge to reap the resources of the earth and direct that wealth toward the spread of the Gospel. They are vital members of the body of Christ that are specifically called to be "provisionaries." Are all who give in order to see the Gospel advance appointed to be provisionaries? No, but many do have this special calling, and yet to a great degree this gift has not been cultivated or nurtured in the Church. To a great extent, a

large portion of the need we see on the cutting edge of Global evangelism is due to the neglect of the office of provisionary. A provisionary is someone, who is called to provide the means for the vision, one who "connects" with a vision or ministry. He is someone who believes in a vision and is willing to do whatever it takes to get it accomplished. That vision becomes theirs and they delight to see it expand, grow and succeed, all the while channeling their resources into it. Resources include wealth, influence and power. Provisionaries draw in others who want to link with the vision, others who want to be involved in the action. Thus the principle of synergy comes into play. Supernatural vision and natural resources combine to bring an explosive force to bear in the earth to accomplish the work of a divine kingdom. We live at a moment in history when God is preparing a generation of provisionaries that will loose the resources of earth into the glorious closure of the Great Commission.

The Void Between Visionaries & Provisionaries

The idea of the businessperson as a valid and anointed minister is a new thought for many. Often members of the pulpit-side of ministry have attempted to transition many of these anointed provisionaries to one of the five-fold ministry offices. Because of this we witness an age-old struggle repeating itself time after time.

- The businessperson feels a prompting of the Holy Spirit for deeper commitment.
- Usually seeing only the more visible ministry gifts, the businessperson assumes he or she must be called to take on one of these roles. (For some, the move toward one of the five-fold ministry offices is correct, but for many it is not.)
- Because the call and anointing of the provisionary is little understood, an inward struggle takes place in the businessperson, and he or she feels frustrated not being able to find a place in which to fit.
- The minister does not know how to relate to the provisionary's call and therefore does not understand the frustration of the provisionary.

Provisionaries generally abound in leadership abilities. The temptation of the Church is to pull them from their God-given role into something that doesn't suit them. Often the assumption is that those in the pulpit are more consecrated or "called" in their pursuit of the things of God. Ministers who do not know how to relate to the businessperson and develop his or her gift as a provisionary can many times be worse than not recognizing the gift and calling at all.

Mixed signals

Let's examine some of the mixed signals between the minister and provisionary. Primarily, preachers deal in spiritual matters, which to the natural mind are seemingly abstract, while businesspeople work with the pragmatic realities of the business world on a daily basis. The very calling on a businessperson's life makes him a quantifier. For example, suppose a businessperson wants to assist in an evangelistic campaign. He approaches the evangelist and asks, "How many souls can you win with a given budget?" The average minister would reel in shock at such a question, thinking, "How could that guy be so carnal!" Do you see the point? The businessperson's question, from his perspective, is not wrong; he is a quantifier.

The average business mind and the average minister's mentality are often miles apart. Neither is wrong; they just have different perspectives.

The minister has the role of providing ministry vision for the Body of Christ; therefore, the minister or "visionary" must make the first move in bridging this gap. Because a businessperson is a quantifier, those casting a ministry vision must learn how to break it down into quantifiable goals. Some ministers have understanding at this level; however, many have missed the true point. For instance, a building project readily presents itself as a measurable goal. The businessperson can easily relate to the successive steps taken in building a structure. At times however, the visionary, knowing he must keep his provisionaries challenged, may go astray and "create" projects just to keep the businessperson involved. These "busy-work" projects are a synthetic vision. A great temptation exists for the minister to look at the businessperson simply as another means to accomplish ministry goals. However if a project does not equate to souls for God's Kingdom, at some point the provisionary will become discouraged and go back to making money only for personal gain.

Hooking up with the vision

Another challenge in relating to the provisionary is the vision itself. Every called provisionary yearns in his or her spirit to be dynamically hooked up with a Kingdom vision which relates to his or her gift. It is the responsibility of the pulpit side of ministry to help the provisionary find where they fit in the vision. When this takes place provisionaries can see themselves as an integral part of fulfilling the vision of taking the gospel into the earth.

The business world would never consider placing time and resources behind a project that wasn't clearly defined. With any envisioned project, goals are established and clearly defined steps are set forth to achieve those goals. The steps will include things such as time projections, budgets, and blueprints for each phase of the endeavor.

Equally, strategic planning or a lack thereof, plays one of the most important roles in the advancement of God's Kingdom in the earth.

In a similar way simply broadcasting ministry vision as a whole is not enough in the process of helping provisionaries find their role. I am reminded of a situation in the ship ministry in which I was involved. Time after time I presented the vision of taking the Gospel into the earth through what we were doing to the crewmembers. I was aware that I must always keep it before them. However, somehow this did not seem to be enough. Why? Let's take the guy down in the engine room, for example. He is working away in 120°F heat seven days a week. He is working 30 days without a break, cleaning the same oil leak time after time. Do you get the picture? At some point this poor guy will wonder how what he is doing has anything to do with taking nations for Jesus! He needs something he can relate to in the daily grind! He needs to see where he fits in the scheme of things. He must see how he can be the best at what he does for the Lord. He also needs to be rewarded for his accomplishments, and if he is so inclined, he needs the steps laid out before him in order to move up through the ranks in his department.

In order to grab hold, the businessperson needs the vision broken down into clear and quantifiable goals where he or she can see the point at which they can integrate. Then it is natural for the businessperson to see themselves as a vital part.

Luke 14:28

Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? (NIV)

Too many worthy Kingdom endeavors are never built upon a proper foundation of practically applied planning. Because of this, those visions receive little support by which they could succeed. In contrast, an African missionary I know now makes a point of always breaking each of his projects down into specific steps and goals. He created a personal revolution by doing so. He now has sufficient participation in every project. For instance, he was ministering in an outreach, being done in a prison, that needed some equipment. In the past he would have asked for months to get enough support for a project like this. On this occasion, however, he clearly outlined his objectives, and defined the cost of each of the required items. He then offered the project as an investment opportunity for his Bible School students to invest in God's Kingdom, closely outlining the dividends in the lives of those reached. Later, the "investors" were allowed to see the completion of the project. This brings us to our next issue.

Businessperson as investor

The minister must understand the businessperson's nature as an investor. This idea may seem obvious; however, when the minister is relating to the businessperson as a provisionary, many times the investment mentality is overlooked. If the businessperson is always approached on a "give" basis, he will become frustrated at some point. By his very nature he will protect his investments and, if there is something he is doing that is not paying dividends, it will eventually get cut out of his agenda. The immediate response of the minister is, "That's wrong; I must teach more on giving." In this case, the preacher actually needs retraining. *What we do in the Kingdom is always an investment.*

The visionary must change not only his terminology, but also his mentality concerning investment. As referred to earlier, Luke 16:8 describes the sons of this age being wiser in relation to their own kind than the sons of light. The visionary must demonstrate how the provisionary can invest in the vision and what dividends that investment will pay in the Kingdom of God. Those called to be a provisionary are not mere "givers"; they are "investors."

The Kingdom's achievers

The nature of the provisionary is also built around accomplishment. The true provisionary makes a practice of achievement. Some time back a minister approached me with what he viewed as a problem. He related, "I am associated with so many businesspersons in our community that know God has a higher purpose for their lives, yet they don't attend church. At times I have lengthy discussions with them about God's call on their life. They readily acknowledge this often with tears welling up in their eyes." In frustration, my friend went on to say, "Why don't these people attend my church?" I said, "Because these people do not have a self-help mentality, they are 'do-it' people!" Let me explain. Successful business people look life squarely in the face and effect change. Most rarely indulge themselves in failure cycles led by a self-help mentality. Successful businesspersons are those that have succeeded in life by finding a way to enrich the lives of others. They understand that success is more than monetary gain.

Unfortunately, this type of person rarely finds a church aligned with these types of priorities. Instead, many churches are centered on a self-help mentality with pastors endlessly frustrated by the lack of accomplishment driven people. The very people the Church needs most are the people we are driving away. A successful person will not subject himself to a steady diet of self-help sermons. This is diametrically opposed to who and what they are. Most are too honest to submit themselves to this out of a desire to shun hypocrisy. So what is the solution? The church needs to offer a place for those that are accomplishment motivated. Not by way of aimless activity, but of true significance. A successful Christian businessman wrote a book in which he

outlined this quest in his life. He aptly described his journey as a transition from success to significance. Significance. **That** is what the Christian businessperson seeks in stepping into the role of provisionary.

Some time ago I was speaking at an impromptu meeting with several successful business people. As I spoke that night, I expounded on the heart cry of God to bring closure to the Great Commission. I made them aware of the vast difference between the cutting edge of reaching the unreached, and projects that focus on those who have heard the gospel message repeatedly. Many of those listening were discouraged with the lack of effectiveness their finances were having in the Kingdom of God. As I continued to speak I could feel their dissatisfaction and their yearning to support more strategic efforts in Gospel advancement. Then I posed a question. How would they feel about the possibility of focusing *their resources* toward bringing closure to the Great Commission? What if they had an effective way to support those that are truly on the cutting edge of global evangelism? What happened next surprised me. Almost spontaneously, they shouted in affirmation. I was a little startled by their abrupt reaction. *This cry, however, was from their hearts. Possibly for the first time in their lives*, they heard something that freed their pent-up desire to move from mere success in life to significance in God's Kingdom.

Influencers of Society

A research firm recently announced that the church would be totally irrelevant to society within the next few decades if it doesn't make some major changes. When I first heard this, I was a little shocked and perplexed. Let's analyze this by asking ourselves a simple question. Who has more influence in modern society, the minister or the businessperson? If taken at face value of sheer time spent with the average citizen, the businessperson has approximately ten times that of the minister. Time spent with people is not the only measure of influence; however, this reaches into most areas of society including economy, politics and public opinion. The modern day forces of innovation and advertising have shaped the face of every society they have touched, and the dynamo behind all of this is business!

Some time ago, I visited a very poor nation. Neither innovation nor advertising had affected this country to any great degree. While there, it struck me as to how much simpler it would be to bring the gospel to this nation as opposed to a more "developed" nation. Why? Because their society had not been fragmented by ideology, opinion, or fads that come from thriving commerce. Like it or not these are very real and ever present forces in our world. However, without passing judgment as to the rights or wrongs of these influences, how is the Church going to get back on the same page with modern society? It must first start to relate to those that influence

society. In modern culture the church has been functioning on a model that resembles something like this:

God

Minister

Businessperson \ Society

We live in an age though, when God is raising up those outside of the pulpit with just as strong of anointing as those behind the pulpit. We have witnessed this partly by the Christian business organizations that have helped shape global Christianity in the last several decades.

The Church exists in an age, that in order to influence the society it exists in, it must first affect those that wield the influence. We may not be accustomed to thinking this way, but the business world has its own Apostles, Prophets, and so on. We call them entrepreneurs. Whether sinner or saved, these people are shaping the world we live in. They are gifted at what they do. God's highest desire for their lives is to know His saving grace, and find significance in the Kingdom of God, doing what they do best. What do they do best? Harness the earth's resources, and influence the lives of others. If God is anointing men and women as provisionaries, and they have both the position and gifts to shape society, then maybe our ministry model needs a second look. A more relevant model may resemble the following diagram:

God



Minister Businessperson

Society

The Word of God is clear to point out the Body of Christ as one, containing many members, none functioning independent of the other. The Church will take the proper place of shaping the world it exists in, when it comes to grip with the fact that many times those outside of the pulpit are playing a greater role, in reaching society. A strategic partnership is needed between the minister and the Christian businessperson, the visionary and provisionary, those that go and those that send.

Specific calling

Finally, the provisionary has specific spiritual needs in order to fully equip him for his calling. Just because a businessperson knows how to make money, does not mean he or she is prepared to hook up with the Kingdom of God as a called and anointed provisionary. The businessperson must grow in the grace of his calling. In the next chapter we will look at one of the principles that plays a critical role in the life of the provisionary.

Firstfruits

Very clear guidelines govern the inner workings and operation of the Kingdom of God. Because we can't physically see God's Kingdom it would be easy to think of it in an abstract sense, having no set order or conditions. Even though our Heavenly Father is sovereign in His dealing with individuals, His realm of rule has very purposeful and well-established laws. One of the most recognized among these laws is "sowing and reaping." Many other principles govern the Kingdom of God, however, and are just as crucial to the success of our operation in this life. The fact is that God placed these laws into effect for our good. These laws of the Kingdom are ever-present and are often in effect whether we are actively using them or not. *They are here for us to use, not for them to use us.*

It is crucial for the provisionary to study and understand the function and boundaries of these laws of the Kingdom. By these principles they will either experience success or failure. Interestingly, a great portion of common business thought and practice can be found in the book of Proverbs.

There are concepts, though, that the "world's" pool of thought does not understand. As a matter of fact, some of God's principles are diametrically opposed to those of man. An example is the law of Firstfruits. I believe the law of Firstfruits has transcended the legal requirement of the same name that the nation of Israel was required to keep. It is a governing principle of God's Kingdom and shapes our lives

today. Much insight can be gleaned, however, by studying the Old Covenant law of Firstfruits. Let's take a look.

Deut 26:1-11

When you have entered the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance and have taken possession of it and settled in it, take some of the firstfruits of all that you produce from the soil of the land the LORD your God is giving you and put them in a basket. Then go to the place the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name and say to the priest in office at the time, "I declare today to the LORD your God that I have come to the land the LORD swore to our forefathers to give us."

The priest shall take the basket from your hands and set it down in front of the altar of the LORD your God.

Then you shall declare before the LORD your God: "My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labor. Then we cried out to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression.

"So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; and now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, O LORD, have given me."

Place the basket before the LORD your God and bow down before him.

And you and the Levites and the aliens among you shall rejoice in all the good things the LORD your God has given to you and your household.

First, we see that Firstfruits had nothing to do with the tithe. The tithe was counted after completion of the harvest.

Firstfruits were the choicest of the first of all of the increase. God required the first and finest portion for Himself. Through this, by placing God above their wealth, the hearts of the Israelites were kept from greed and covetousness.

Next, we find that the bringing of the firstfruits was an act of faith. No further harvest was to be done until the firstfruits were personally brought to Jerusalem. This threw total dependence on God to protect and bless the rest of the harvest that sat in the fields waiting on them to return and resume their work. This act placed their wealth directly in God's hands. Naturally speaking, any sort of calamity could have wiped out the remainder of the harvest, leaving them with nothing.

Proverbs 3:9-10 reveals the nature of this covenant act.

Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.

If they obeyed the Lord in offering their firstfruits, He made certain the remainder of the harvest was abundantly blessed.

So we also learn that the offering of the firstfruits was tied directly to the blessing of God in their lives. *By specifically giving to God the first of their increase, and in faith walking away from the harvest until they had worshiped God with their gifts, the Lord was being directly involved in their increase of wealth.*

Interestingly, the ceremony of Firstfruits was not fully instituted until the people of Israel had entered their promised land of abundance. It was one of the chief safeguards to assure their continued success and prosperity in their new land. It presented them on a regular basis with the opportunity to choose their allegiance and to live it out in a very practical way: "You cannot serve both God and money" (Luke 13:16). By not putting their wealth above God, and by faith placing their welfare in God's hands, God was able to loose blessing into their lives.

Finally, we learn that this tradition was a personal recognition of God's blessings in their lives. As we see in the Scriptures, the firstfruits were ceremonially brought before the Lord. It was such a personal witness of the Lord's blessing that the individuals offered it up before God themselves. Great celebration and pomp were all part of this tradition. The people paraded their choicest wealth through the paths of Israel on their way to Jerusalem in baskets. Can you picture the joy of abundance that this spectacle must have represented? There was a parade of thousands throughout the land carrying evidence of God's finest blessing. As a final part of this great pageant, the participants were to recite an oration giving public verbal testimony to God's fulfillment of his covenant of blessing. They presented their gift both as a witness to God's faithfulness, and as partakers of that blessing.

Today we live in a world with Christian doctrines that are very confused on the issue of earthly blessing from God. Two extremes are usually represented. At one end of the spectrum, we see a belief that all natural wealth is evil and earthly poverty is part of being Godly. This view does not give full credit to the goodness of God. On the other side, we find a religion that teaches that God wants to bless you with everything you could desire in spite of how the rest of the world is suffering. This view is devoid of the concept of sacrifice. If we bring the principle of Firstfruits into focus in a contemporary sense, I believe we can find truth in this matter.

Let's look at the Old Covenant pattern again and see what it holds for us.

Firstfruits was not the tithe

Little distinction is ever made in Christianity today between tithe and firstfruits. The tithe was a tenth of the actual harvest or increase. A tenth portion could only be measured after the harvest was completed. Firstfruits, on the other hand, was a special sacrificial gift which was given to God first, before one's own portion was taken. It was also an offering of the choicest and best, therefore honoring God above ourselves. We live in a day when sacrifice is viewed as an undesirable word. When we give into God's Kingdom the first and the best of all that we have, it gives no place for idolatry to "things" in our lives. It is a holy sacrifice that places us in the flow of blessing.

Firstfruits was an act of faith

Numerous times I have seen business people approach a minister with a proposition, "If you will pray that this business deal goes through, when it does I'll bless your ministry with the proceeds." Have you ever heard a proposition like this? Of the thousands of dollars I have heard promised like this, I have never seen one of these deals come through. For years I have complained to God, wondering why he didn't bless even one of these transactions. I don't think I was alone, either. There probably have been a lot of business people making those promises left wondering why their deals never went through.

One day I heard one of the members of our leadership team remark, "We have so many business people promising large gifts when they get their big payoffs. What they need to do is stop waiting for the 'big one' to come through and just give what they can on a consistent basis." All of a sudden, I recognized it! There was the principle of Firstfruits! Without realizing it, each of these well-meaning businessmen were literally saying, "Lord, after I am certain that I have my harvest safely in the barn, then I will give you your portion." Unknowingly they were placing a death sentence on the very transactions with which they intended to bless God's Kingdom. These business deals were cursed from the outset because they violated the principles of Firstfruits.

When we give to God *before* seeing the harvest, just as Israel did with their firstfruits, we are placing our dealings directly in His hands by faith, believing Him for the outcome.

Proverbs 3:9-10

Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.

God will make certain our transactions are blessed *in response* to our act of faith.

The blessing of God was a direct result of Firstfruits

Here we have a divine paradox: How can blessing be associated with sacrifice? Interestingly, the business people that I have seen God bless most were the ones that lived by the principles of Firstfruits — even if unknowingly. These people were living the role of true provisionaries.

The character of a true provisionary has some specific traits. The primary characteristic is that they place God first in all matters. Second, they always give their best. Third, they are consistent or faithful. Fourth, they are worshipers; they give God glory for all that He has given them.

Living by the principle of Firstfruits is no longer a law that we must obey. It is one of the *principles of God's Kingdom* made available to us, a principle that assures our hearts are positioned correctly to receive the flow of God's blessing.

Firstfruits was a celebration of God's blessings

I sat one evening in a quaint but beautifully decorated prayer room located in a church I was attending. Sitting there alone, communing with the Lord, I said, "Lord, this room is so nice, I sure do like it." The Lord spoke back to me so quickly and distinctly that it surprised me. The Father said, "I like beautiful things too. I gave the ability to create all of this to someone. Don't you think heaven will be beautiful, son?" This may sound ridiculous, but that was a new thought to me! Somehow, before that I unconsciously thought that God could care less about what I viewed as beautiful. The world seemed to be so full of hurt and pain. How, through all of that, could God be interested in beauty or blessing?

In the Old Covenant celebration, the finest of God's blessing was "shown off" as it streamed in procession throughout the land. The Father was putting on display the manifestation and blessings of His covenant with man. I Corinthians 15:20 refers to Jesus being the embodiment of firstfruits. As we look at the life of Christ through the eyes of the New Testament, we can see blessing, beauty and abundance. Christ, the healing, forgiveness, and provision that flowed from Him were paraded by the Heavenly Father throughout Israel while on earth. Jesus was the manifestation of God's finest blessing for mankind. In the same fashion, God's abundant natural provision was displayed and celebrated in the days of the Old Covenant Firstfruits celebration.

John 6:35

Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."

God's desire is to bless his children. Blessing flows in the presence of gratitude and right relationship with God. He longs for the age when sin, poverty, and pain will be done away with and all creation rejoices in His blessing. Until then, we are agents of distributing His blessing in the earth.

II Corinthians 9:8

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.

The Book of Acts begins with the statement, "... all that Jesus began to do and to teach" By the Holy Spirit, He is now at work in us, bringing completion to His labor. The provisionary especially stands in the role of harnessing the earth's wealth in order to bring God's blessing to mankind.

Epilogue

In 1991, I was in the former Soviet Union with the shipping ministry I was involved in at the time. We were in Leningrad, which had just been re-named St. Petersburg. During the coup in which president Gorbachev was taken captive, we were holding one of the first and largest evangelistic campaigns in the city. Many of the Russian people were facing hunger, so we brought in Gospel literature and food to be distributed to the country. At the meetings, we gathered the ministers in a back room where we apportioned food and literature to them.

I had a life changing experience during one of these sessions. At the time, I was trying to direct this group in an orderly and peaceful distribution. My attempts at organizing this crowd, however, were in vain. Pandemonium broke out when people saw the goods we were distributing. As I stood on a loading dock overlooking the situation, I became more frustrated by the moment. I had an overwhelming desire to just scream to the top of my lungs, "Stop!" At that very moment, the Holy Spirit spoke to me. "Son, do you know who these people are?" Somehow when God speaks to you like that, you know to wait for the answer.

He continued, "These are the holy ones that up have carried the light of the Gospel in this nation in the midst of persecution. You have prayed for some of these very ones. Some of these have been tortured for their faith yet remained faithful. I have provided this feast for them and allowed you to set it before them." I had an immediate change of heart. What looked to me as pandemonium before became a glorious feast of celebration. I dove in with the rest and began to help them haul things away.

As I was assisting some of these dear saints, I noticed two older men trying to stuff boxes of food and Bibles in a small red vehicle. They were obviously perplexed as to how they were going to get all of this in that small car. Being a self-proclaimed expert at packing cargo (since we moved about 4000 cu. tons on every voyage), I went over to offer my assistance. After a short time, we had stuffed all of the food and literature in this poor little red Russian car. The two gentlemen had tearful looks of gratitude on their faces. I could tell that they so desperately wanted to communicate their appreciation and what their ministry was accomplishing. I looked eye to eye with one of these gentlemen, watching tears stream down his weathered face. I could speak no Russian; he could speak no English. Then I saw a glimmer in his eyes as he realized that there was probably a word that I would understand. He said "Chernobyl."

At that moment, I saw one of our interpreters pass by. I grabbed her and said, "Tell me what this man is saying." As the story unfolded, I found that these men had driven thousands of miles, hearing that Christians from the West had come and might have brought clean food. They had been ministering among the children of Chernobyl. When the nuclear accident occurred, the Russian government hid the potential dangers of the radioactive fallout. The people in the danger zones were never evacuated. No safe food was available in the area — even what they grew was in contaminated soil and contained high levels of radiation. These men had traveled all that way to bring another few days of hope to the people and children of Chernobyl.

I stood stunned by the reality that, what may have seemed to me, a series of unrelated events was all part of God's mighty hand of provision. How many more incredible stories had passed so close to my life unknown to me?

More than that, how easy, even while supplying great provision, to take that role so lightly.

One can scarcely encounter a missionary without hearing a story of anguish and answered prayer for provision in the face of great need. These retellings of great miracle answers almost always conclude with the provision coming at the last possible second. We've become accustomed to honoring these testimonies, holding in high esteem the faith and determination of the individuals. With that, we have received a wrong view of our Heavenly Father. It is as if He was so concerned for His personal Glory that He would withhold desperately needed provision from those that were doing their best to reach the lost masses for Him. No, God has not been holding out. The truth is Satan is doing his all to lengthen his reign in the earth. He is purposely slowing the progress of those on the cutting edge of bringing closure to the Great Commission, while Christians have been duped into believing God is withholding from those doing the greatest good for His kingdom.

Nature tells us that effort and difficulty reach their maximum at the point of greatest resistance. The resistance in the area of provision for the cutting edge of evangelism is very real, but we have misunderstood the source of the conflict. In truth the church is invading the final areas of Satan's strongholds, when it thrusts the gospel into the last reached regions of the earth. More has been done concerning closure of the Great Commission in the last one hundred years of history than the previous two millennia. This immense global advancement of the kingdom of God is pushing the outer limits of the envelope of Satan's dominion. He'll do anything to slow this progress. One of his chief tools is resisting in the area of provision. Satan is restraining the provision for the harvest. Not God!

Because of the great inroads into the strongholds of Africa such great heroes of faith as John G. Lake have been buffeted so severely by the lack of provision when on the mission field that even he retreated to the western world. His journal records that fifteen of his church planters died within one year of his support being cut off from the west. John's own wife starved to death on the field. However, many of the churches he planted remain to this day.

What are the great men and women of God on the cutting edge of reaching the unreached, to conclude in such circumstances? Often it is the wrong message. God is not withholding from His front line soldiers. Satan is withholding the resources!

The earth groans for the day when the children of God will begin to redeem its resources, and convert this wealth into provision to reach eternal souls for Christ. We have come to the dawn of a new dispensation; this is the hour for God to raise up those that will provide for the harvest of souls in the earth. This is the hour of the provisionary.

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*Father, the fields are ripe for the harvest.
Send forth Your provisionaries into the earth.*