

Not Enough Support?

Two strategies to get your income where it needs to be.

By Betty Barnett, Holmes M. Bryant Jr.

1. How are you handling the finances you already have? If you handle well what little you do have, more will be added, but if you handle poorly what little you have, even that will be taken away. This was one of the statements that Jesus made, and I think it applies both to our finances and our relationships. One thing I often find in people who are struggling with support is they are not giving anymore. They say, "I can't afford to tithe." My response is, "You can't afford not to."

2. Are you in debt? Debt is a huge issue that is often a paralysis point the enemy uses. We're to see debt as an enemy, not as a friend, and too many people today see debt as a companion. Even in YWAM, credit cards have become a way of "walking by faith." But I see it as you're walking by plastic, you're not walking by faith. I believe God meets us as we ask, "Lord, how do I address this debt?" He may give us a strategy of how much we can pay on each debt per month. If we don't stand up to it, we're going to lay under it and it's going to consume us.

3. How are you handling communication with those people God has put into your life? Act in a spirit of generosity. That's a key I felt God gave me many years ago. If we live a life of generosity, then He will provide for us through others in a spirit of generosity. But we can't do that in a selective way where we are picking who we want to be generous back to us, because that's not generosity. It's manipulation. We've got different realms of depth of relationship. Some are very close friends and some will always be better described as "acquaintances." So we should relate to these people in different ways. We should treat those with the highest level of relationship commitment with the highest level of communication back.

4. What is your calling and how certain are you that God has led you into ministry? We often need to go back and be reminded about what God said in the first place, to boost our own faith and to remind us that God is in this. There must be a way then. He did call me to this and therefore He must have the provision. I'm convinced that when God calls us, He also is in the process of calling a team of people to join with us in that ministry. Our job is to walk in God's ways in order to see His full blessing on our work.

The Back Door/Front Door Plan

If your support is inadequate, I would concentrate first on closing the back door, then look for opportunities to open the front door a little wider.

Closing the back door:

*Increase frequency of your prayer letters to at least six times per year (preferably eight) for staff in developed countries and at least four (preferably six or more) for staff in

developing countries. If current partners aren't hearing from us, they are less likely to see their commitment as a priority and will be much less willing to give us the names of their friends as prospective partners.

***Contact by phone** (if in your home country) or by mail (if overseas) those who recently stopped their support. This should be done after only two missed months in a row. Waiting longer than three or four months makes it more difficult to make the contact. The approach should be one of concern for the partner, not accusing them of missing. If someone has stopped supporting you, you want to know why. Many times there will be opportunity for ministry, such as when a partner loses a job or suffers some other financial reversal due to illness, etc. But most times, they just need a gentle reminder and they appreciate it, too.

***Become proactive in praying for your partners.** Solicit prayer requests from them, but don't wait till you hear from them to pray for them. If you have 120 partners who give regularly or occasionally, pray specifically for two each day during your quiet time. In this way, you can pray through your partners six times in the course of a year. Send a note occasionally indicating you prayed for them today, especially if you've received a specific request from them.

Now that we've closed the back door, we can look for opportunities to open the front door wider:

***Give your partners an opportunity to increase their commitment every two or three years.** If their giving stays the same, inflation begins to eat away at the value of their gift. For most people, earnings and discretionary income increase throughout their lives until retirement. Exceptions are birth of first child, especially if the wife will no longer work, and when children of your partners begin their college years. Asking for an increase is best done face-to-face, but a letter followed by a phone call is also effective.

***Give your partners an opportunity to make a gift for some special need every two or three years.** Many monthly partners will give a special 13th gift if asked to do so. Those who only give occasionally should be asked more often, at least once a year.

***Go to those people who are not financial partners on your mailing list with a request for financial support.** Don't do this through one of your regular prayer/news letters. The best way is face-to-face. If that's not possible, write a letter followed by a phone call in a week or ten days. Make it a personalized letter directed to each individual. This should also be true for the previous two items.

***Use dinner parties to raise additional support quickly.** Ask an existing partner to host a dinner in their home. Dinner works much better than dessert—you'll get more people to come and fewer will back out at the last minute. After dinner, make your presentation. Indicate you would like each person there to prayerfully consider supporting you, but let them know you are not asking for their decision that evening. Tell them their host (if they've agreed to do so) or you will be calling them in the next day or two for

their decision. Don't pass out comment cards and don't leave pledge cards for them to send in later. You can send these in the mail based on their answer on the phone.

***When making presentations, whether in a group or one-on-one, tell stories of lives who've been changed as a result of your ministry.** Don't just talk about strategies and statistics. People like to hear about people. That's what makes your ministry come alive and seem real to the listener. If you're in a supporting role, tell stories of changed lives from those on the "front lines" who benefit from your services; then link what you are doing to those you serve.

***Don't be afraid to ask boldly. If done correctly it is not offensive.** There are several correct ways to ask. A good non-offensive "ask" that you might memorize is, "Would you be in a position to support me in this ministry at (first amount) or (second amount) per month?" It's always best to ask for a specific amount or a couple of amounts. People like to do what you expect them to do. Asking is biblical. In 1Kings 17:7-14 Elijah was told by God that He had "commanded" (NASB, NIV) a certain widow to provide for him. When Elijah arrived, he still had to "ask" her for food. In fact, he had to ask twice. Either she didn't know of God's command, didn't recognize it when it came, or perhaps Elijah was the one delivering the command. I'm convinced God has "commanded" those who will be on our support team. But in most cases, that doesn't relieve us of the responsibility of asking.

Ref: categorie(s): Support Raising