

# STEWARDSHIP

We have all we will ever need

a sermon resource created by Jim Richie



Scripture reading:

*Haggai 2:7-9: "I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory," says the Lord Almighty. 'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the Lord Almighty. 'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the Lord Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace,' declares the Lord Almighty." Amen.*

As we begin to reflect on this passage from Haggai and this topic of stewardship, I am reminded of a line from a song by one of my all-time favorite bands; 'The God I believe in isn't short of cash, mister'.

This memorable line was sung by Bono on the U2 song 'Bullet the Blue Sky', and it is a typically acerbic and culturally pointed comment from him as he reflects on the hypocrisy of some TV evangelists extorting money from those who can afford it least.

It resonates with me in several ways, both as a musician, who has always believed that the songwriter has an opportunity, and a responsibility, to speak truth and shed light on injustices, and misunderstandings of who God is.

It also connects with me as a long-time local church Pastor, a District Superintendent and now the Regional Director of Eurasia. It reflects two common misconceptions about God and money that I have found in the church and in missions.

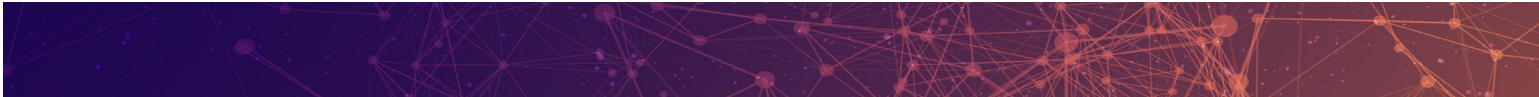
The first misconception is that we are somehow always lacking what we need to be the church. That we don't have everything required to do the job God has called us to. That even God doesn't have all that we need, so this creates a sort of impoverished, orphan spirit within the church. Or if we do believe God does have it, we are not totally convinced He is going to give it to us.

I have led so many church meetings where finance and stewardship were on the agenda and have been shocked at how little trust and faith there was in the room that God not only had what we needed but also that He was more than willing to give it to us for the sake of His Kingdom.

The next misconception is that in a missional context those in new areas, and in particular socio-economically poorer cultures, will always require charity and subsidy from richer countries to effectively be the church. This then can create two problems;

1. a culture of dependency in those who receive,
2. and a saviour complex in those who give.

In my RD role I see this has happened many times on our region historically, and it debilitates the mission, whilst perpetuating the dependency on outside funding. We are working very hard in Eurasia to break this for good.



For it is my absolute conviction that every local church, anywhere in the world, has within it all they need from God to be all He has called them to be, without becoming indebted and dependent on **anyone but Him**. Our source is the Lord. Any other notion creates an unsustainable context and displays a seriously poor and unbiblical missiology. God has revealed Himself in scripture as Jehovah Jireh, *'The Lord will provide'* (Genesis 22:14), therefore, as we put our whole trust in Him, step out in faith and in partnership with Him, we are assured by His word that He will provide. There are no geographical or economic restrictions on this promise!

I have witnessed this with my own eyes on many occasions, when people take God at His word and dare to do as He asks, then He comes through in incredible ways.

In some of the most remote and poorest areas of our Region there are miracles of provision, and even abundance, where God's people have put their full trust in Him and partnered with what they have, and watched Him multiply it and use it to build the church and the Kingdom.

Just like the young man who gave Jesus his 5 loaves and 2 fish (Matthew 14), when we give what we have in our hands, God opens His hands and does what only He can do with us and for us. And the work of His hands is marvellous.

My personal stewardship model is Provision through Partnership. Whether it be for a local church or in global missions we must always have an intentional attitude and practice of

- a. faith in God and dependence on Him,
- b. generosity within the church in how we give, and
- c. partnership in giving. Partnership with God and each other.

Indeed, I believe that the Lord takes this matter of provision through partnership even further as He speaks through the prophet Malachi, in a passage we probably all know well, but maybe don't all fully understand the implications of God's words there.

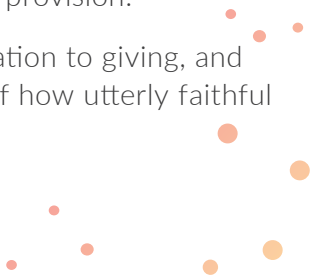
*"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.'" Malachi 3:10*

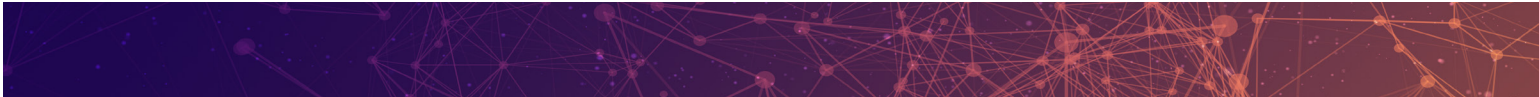
This is one of the very few places in scripture where the Lord asks us to put Him to the test! It's like He is saying, 'go on then...try me on this...and see if I don't do exactly as I promised'. He really is putting his reputation on the line, fully confident that if we keep our part of this covenant partnership in giving, He will deliver...and then some!

As a parent and now a grandparent I know the danger to my reputation, credibility, and even popularity, in making promises and guarantees! They must be kept. And here the Lord is totally relaxed and assured about making such an extravagant claim.

My wife Maggie and I have been in ministry for 42 years now. We have had really challenging times financially over those years, and we have learnt much about the Lord's character and provision.

We have also learnt much through our own lack of faith, disobedience at times in relation to giving, and what biblical stewardship looks like. Yet in it all we have always been able to testify of how utterly faithful the Lord is.





He has always provided for us and our family. Sometimes through the provision we received from the church as our employer, sometimes through the love and generosity of church friends and family standing in the gap for us, and sometimes by what we can only explain as timely miracles.

In our earliest days in ministry, as students at Glasgow Bible Training Institute and church youth pastors, I well remember a time when we were struggling to make ends meet, whilst at the same time the Bible College (BTI) was experiencing financial difficulties.

There was a large bill that BTI had to pay but the money wasn't there, so the College Principal called a day of prayer and we all joined together to seek the Lord and ask for His help. At the prayer time one college professor prayed about how the Lord owned the 'cattle on a thousand hills' (from Psalm 50), and how he trusted that God would provide out of His great resource for His own work.

A few days later I had a meeting with the College Secretary, and he said that not long after the prayer day a supporter of the BTI, a Scottish farmer, had gone to the cattle market and got a surprisingly large price for his cattle. Way more than he had reckoned on. The Lord led him to give a generous gift to BTI, which covered the outstanding bill!

The College Secretary said that when he made the donation one of the staff members said, 'the Lord has just sold some of the cattle on His thousand hills'. This helped us as a couple know that the Lord would provide for us in a similar way as we stepped out in faith with Him and for Him, just as he had done for the College. And He did!

As RD I have sometimes been concerned, even annoyed, when a missionary leader heard of a financial need in a local church in their field and immediately jumped in with promised donations from a wealthy donor back home. Problem solved? Maybe not.


Whilst the intention of the missionary and the donor were not coming from a bad place at all, I felt that it took away the privilege and joy from the local church of getting down on their knees, calling an all-night prayer meeting, fasting, and crying out to the Lord, then seeing Him come through as the one who provides.

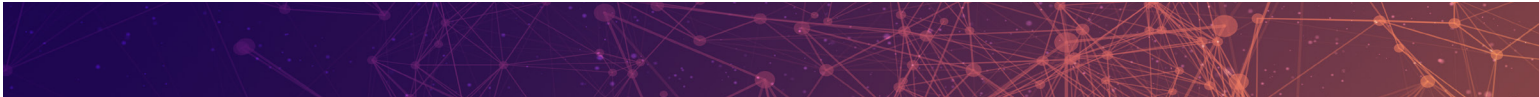
This sort of prayer causes churches to grow and causes faith to rise in God alone. It also kills any dependency culture stone dead.

Now I should say, that at the end of the process the same donor may well have been independently moved by the Lord to send money to this church, just as the farmer did in my BTI story. Yet here, the faith process was cut short, and the need was met by a donor without the church ever really needing to be stretched through it.

And so back to the words of our prophet. I mean Haggai and not Bono! What is the Lord saying to His people here, both then and now. Haggai delivered this prophetic word from the Lord around 500 years before Jesus was born, at a time when the Israelites had returned from exile after 70 years in Babylon. As the people returned there was a much-needed renewal and restoration required, both in the city walls, and the Temple (See Ezra and Nehemiah).

The work of rebuilding was opposed by some, and stalled at times through lack of commitment and personal investment from the people, although they did find the time and money to rebuild their own homes! So, Haggai prophesied in an effort to motivate the people to renew their work of temple restoration.





The main themes of his prophesy are around restoring the Lord's house, and as such restoring His glory. And how the people must work and do their part in the rebuilding by giving of their time and resources. Another model of provision through partnership.

Then, of course, Haggai's main theme is about the sovereignty of the Lord. He alone is in control of the fortunes of His people, and He is equally sovereign over all the nations. Haggai therefore challenges the people to see God for who He is, put their trust in Him, partner with Him by doing what they can, then watch the Lord restore His glory amongst them and in the nations. The promise is that the Lord will not only bring renewal and restoration, but He will also bring revival.

Is this not our heart's cry for the church and our mission across the world? Do we not long for days where the Lord's glory is restored in the church and in the nations, and a great revival breaks out?

Well, I think it is both challenging and powerful to think that here in this prophetic scripture, there is a direct relationship between stewardship and revival. Between our commitment to give in partnership with God, and his willingness to pour out His Spirit and bring people to Himself. I see a Kingdom equation here, **A + B = C**. Could it be that simple?

Therefore, whether it is in the lives of an individual, a couple, or a family. Or in a local church, a District, Field, or Region. Or even in a whole denomination like the Church of the Nazarene. Could our desire to see God move in saving and sanctifying power be more connected to God's desire to see His people walk in total faith, obedience, and Kingdom partnership through our stewardship, than we had ever imagined?

One thing I am sure of is that when we do step out in faith, dependence, and partnership with God for His Kingdom work, we will have all we ever need.