

INVESTING IN HOPE OF A RETURN

By Cecil Culbreth

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 9:8-12

Big Idea:

Our obedience to the biblical principle of giving puts us into a position to be a vital part of what God is doing in the world.

INTRO: WHEN YOU GET INVOLVED IN WHAT GOD IS DOING—YOU ARE A PART OF SOMETHING BIG.

Note: The following information comes from the book, RUN WITH THE VISION BY BOB SJOGREN, BILL & AMY STEARNS; BETHANY HOUSE PUBLISHERS and presents missions works that may or may not be associated with the Assemblies of God, but is given to show that God is at work around the world.

A young group of a 1,000 Puerto Ricans called 'las catacumbas' is mobilizing to reach Muslims! Missionaries in Togo in West Africa saw one preaching point with about 400 worshippers grow in just 5 years to 10 congregations of 4,000 believers!

There were 3,224 new house churches planted in Thailand in the last decade. The church in Laos has grown from 5,000 to 20,000 in just five years!

There are some states in India are claiming to be 95% Christian! **God is doing something big**—His goal is the salvation of the world, for he is not willing that any should perish. Any yet, there is opposition all around us.

In North Africa, the governments of Muslim countries in one recent year spent more to promote missionary activity in eight North African countries than the total western missionary expenditure for the entire world. In countries with a Christian population, plans are to exterminate Christianity.
(Same source as cited above)

We must be reminded that Jesus said, "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not be able to prevail." Satan's best efforts cannot stop what God wants to do in the world.

When we get involved in what God is doing, we become part of something big.

In the passage of scripture we read, Paul shows us one way we can be involved in what God is doing around the world. Paul gives the biblical basis for providing financial support for those involved in occupational ministry. He quotes from an Old Testament passage (Deut. 25:4) usually an illustration from nature. Paul then provides his own illustration concerning a biblical principle. Paul tells us that the farmer plows the soil because he expects a return. The farmer works not for the exercise, but because he wants to feed his family. He knows his investment will generate a return. That is why Paul says, "He plows in hope". There is an expectation that something is going to happen. It is the law of the harvest, "you reap what you sow." The farmer invests time, effort and money in hope of a return.

This biblical principle is still valid today. When we give to God, we are investing in hope of a return, not just for ourselves but for other people. We are getting involved in what God is doing around the world. As a result of our financial investment in LFTL, people will be saved. Their lives will be changed. There will be a harvest. People will be saved. God is still at work.

Consider that the farmer's investment is:

I. PREPARATION FOR A MIRACLE

"He plows in hope" v. 10

WHEN THE FARMER PLOWS, HE IS PREPARING FOR A MIRACLE.

(Talk about how a small seed can produce a bigger harvest, you may even want to have a corn seed or something of that nature to use as an illustration.)

Think about the miracle that takes place from a small seed. Can you imagine how someone would respond who has never seen a corn stalk if you showed them a corn seed and told them what it would produce? The farmer plows knowing that he is preparing the soil for a miracle.

When we give to missions we are preparing for a miracle.

(You may want to consider using the Following Story that was told by Missionary Benny Tipton in March 2000. The story happened in an African nation.)

Story:

A native by the name of Peter was working in a Muslim area. One of the leaders of the city died, had been dead for 2 days. Peter went to pray for him and God raised from the dead. The city officials were so thankful that they approached Peter and asked him what they could do for him. He told them he needed land to build a church.

Several days later the mayor and city council took Peter outside the city and showed him a piece of property. "We are a Muslim city, but we want to give you this land to build a church" Peter said "Thanks, but I cannot accept this land, my God would not be pleased. The mosque is in the center of the town and my God would not be pleased on the outside of town."

Week later, Mayor came back to Peter to tell him they were going to give him land in the center of town, next to the mosque.

God still works miracles today. As exciting as this miracle is, the greatest miracle is when a life is changed by the power of Christ. God takes the work of the farmer and uses that to bring about the miraculous. God takes our work—our investment and uses it to work miracles in the hearts of unsaved people.

LFTL is involved in many areas of ministry. One of those efforts is equipping Christian students here in the USA to share Christ with their friends using the Book of Hope. One of those students sent the following email to His Story Ministries which distributes the Book of Hope:

"I got the five free ones (Book of Hope provided by LFTL) and I gave them out already. One girl that I gave it to was Catholic, and she is now Christian. Another person that I gave one of the books to has accepted Christ and is planning his Baptism. The Book of Hope has been really helpful! If you could provide more of them for the people that joined the Club, that would be great."

Your investment in LFTL is not only reaching people around the world, but is also reach youth and children in the USA.

(If your focus is a cash offering, you may want to talk about how sacrificial giving opens doors for God to provide finances for their personal needs. If your focus is faith promises, the faith promise itself is the preparation for a miracle)

(You may want to use a personal illustration about a time you either made a significant faith promise or offering and how God provided.)

Look what God's Word promises when we make investments in kingdom work.

Phil 4:19 "My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory." Many people claim that promise, but understand the context of that promise. Paul indicated that the Philippian church had given sacrificially to his missionary ministry. (Phil 4:15, 2 Cor 8:1-5) In fact the Philippian believers had given sacrificially even in the midst of their poverty and persecution. It is in that context that Paul gave them the promise that God would supply their needs. That word need literally means gap. The Philippian believers had created gaps in their own lives by their sacrificial given, but God was going to fill in the gaps according to His abundance. They made an investment in hope of a return. Because of their investment there would be a return in their own lives.

Consider that the farmer's investment is a:

II. DEMONSTRATION OF FAITH

"He plows in hope" v. 10

When the farmer plows, he is demonstrating his faith in the law of the harvest. If he plants corn, he will get back corn, only he will get back more corn than what he planted. The farmer plows not just to meet his needs but the needs of a hungry world. He understands the law of the harvest. You get back more than you put in.

(If you used the corn seed earlier, you may want to use a couple of ears of corn at this time. One stalk of corn will produce at least two ears of corn under normal conditions.)

The size of harvest is determined by size of plowing. The more ground he plows the more seed the farmer can put into the ground. He plows in hope.

What is hope?

(Hope (noun and verb), hope (for) elpis NT:1680, in the NT, "favorable and confident expectation" It has to do with the unseen and the future, Rom 8:24,25. Hope describes (a) the happy anticipation of good.)

My Hope is based upon Christ and He is also the object of my hope.

Hope is not based upon what is seen but upon what I believe can happen. Some people will make excuses and say, I can't do anything. What happens when I make an excuse and do nothing?
Prov. 20:4

The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing.

No plowing, no harvest, no faith investment, no return. The farmer has faith in the law of the harvest. He plows in hope.

What has God promised us when we make investments in His work? What has He promised when we get involved in what He is doing?

"Honor the Lord with your possessions, And with the firstfruits of all your increase;
10 So your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with new wine."
(Proverbs 3:9-10 NKJV)

"One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want." (Proverbs 11:24 ESV)

In spite of the economic downturn we are now experiencing we are still a blessed people. Today you have an opportunity to be a blessing.

Today you are going to be given an opportunity to demonstrate your faith by your investment in LFTL.

Your giving is going to help put the Word of God into the hands of people around the world. God's Word is the most powerful proclamation of the gospel that we can provide. God's Word is what He uses to save us.

"Since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; 24 for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, 25 but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you." (ESV)

We are making an investment in hope of a return, not just our own financial blessing but people will be saved because of what we invest.

"Give and it shall be given unto you." (Luke 6:38)

Conclusion:

(The following story comes from Christianity Today, March/April 2007)

Jeff Leeland had just accepted a teaching position at Kamiakin Junior High in Seattle, Washington. The family had endured months of Dad's driving to and from work before the family could relocate from their previous home.

As winter struggled toward spring in 1992, Jeff and Kristi heard the devastating news: "Your baby boy has cancer. Michael needs a bone marrow transplant." The good news was that Michael's six-year-old sister, Amy, was a perfect match for the transplant. But Jeff's insurance company wouldn't pay for it. A tiny clause in the contract coldly stated that Jeff had to be on the job for at least a year before they would cover a transplant. He had only been teaching in the new job for six months. By March, Michael's need for a transplant became urgent. If he couldn't receive the new marrow soon, his illness would progress quickly, and he would die. The Leelands needed to raise an impossible sum of \$200,000 by May.

Fellow teacher Joe Kennedy told his class about Mr. Leeland's situation. Dameon, a seventh grade boy who walked with a limp and struggled in special education classes, heard about Mr. Leeland's son, Michael, and made a visit to Jeff's house.

"Mr. Leeland, don't make a big deal out of this...if your baby's in trouble, I want to help out." Dameon, the kid others teased, reached out his hand and stuffed 12 five-dollar bills into the hand of a teacher who had made a difference in his life. It was the boy's life savings.

Word got out about "Dameon's gift." Some kids organized a walk-a-thon. Others contacted a local newspaper. Others held a car wash.

The Kamiakin kids' wave of compassion poured out across Seattle. On Friday, May 22nd, a man walked into the bank with a check for ten thousand dollars. One week after Dameon's gift, Michael's fund grew to \$16,000. By late May, area TV stations picked up the story. The response from the news stories was overwhelming. When a TV news broadcast pronounced victory for Michael, the Kamiakin Junior High kids went crazy with happiness. Only four weeks after Dameon's gift of \$60, the Michael Leeland Fund totaled over \$220,000.

Michael got the marrow transplant. He lived. Dameon, the boy who gave sacrificially so another could live, accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior after becoming close with Michael's family. ONE HANDICAPPED BOY PLANTED A SEED OF \$60.00 THAT PRODUCED A \$220,000 MIRACLE. HE GAVE ALL HE HAD. HE PLOWED IN HOPE

What will you do to put God's Word, the message of salvation into the hands of those who do not know him?

Cecil Culbreth: Founder and President of His Story Ministries, works with churches and ministries within the United States to provide copies of the various editions of Book of Hope on a donation basis. Cecil and his wife Patti, serve as US Missionaries with the Assemblies of God.