DONORS LIVING BY FAITH

Posted on September 14, 2015 by Eddie

None of us can know or predict how God will use our time our energy or our finances; sometimes he brings amazing success and other times he stretches our faith by long periods of apparent failure.
Category: Observations

I hate the phrase "living by faith". At least I hate the phrase when it is used as a way to describe missionaries or other Christian workers who don't have a regular salary, but rely on donations from friends, families and churchesÂ for their regular income.

I don't like the phrase because it seems rather super-spiritual and, anyway, the Biblical picture is that we should all be living by faith in all aspects of our lives, not just the financial one. But this post is about finance, so I'll stick to that aspect for the moment.

In the jargon, Sue and I live by faith; we don't know how much money we will receive each month, but so far we haven't gone hungry or failed to pay our bills, soÂ God seems to be keeping things working. But what about the kind people who support us, some of them extremely sacrificially, what can they expect for their money?

Well, we can more or less promise that each day, Sue will knuckle down to working on translation issues in Madagascar and that slowly, but surely the Gospels will be published in yet another language. You can be pretty sure that I'll spend part of the day staring at my laptop in frustration trying to write some words that will help people to think about world mission in new ways, on other days, I attend meetings and try to inspire, encourage and cajole people into different ways of working. A chunk of our support is spent on paying the TV licence, buying dog food and frozen pizzas for our Friday night tradition and I do have to own up to a very expensive running-shoe habit.

In other words, we spend the supportÂ in the same sorts of ways that other people spend their money, but it allows us to do jobs that are rather different to those done by most people. The generous support we receive allows us to do a certain type of work. What it doesn't do, is promise that this work will have predeterminedÂ results. We can't promise that thousands of people in Madagascar will read the Scriptures and have their lives turned upside down or that the British missionary movement will see a massive re-invigoration. We'd love these things to happen and we do what we can to create the conditions for them; but the ultimate results are out of our hands. In terms of final outcomes, we and our supporters are all living by faith. The Holy Spirit blows like the wind and can't be controlled by our programmes.

The reason I'm highlighting this is that good fundraising techniques suggest that agencies wanting to interest donors (especially what are called 'high value donors') need to promise that the donor's money will achieve certain ends. "Give us X dollars and Y will happen." Worryingly, some Christian fundraising organisations seem to be falling into this trap.

OK, at one level it works. You can reasonably predict that it will cost a set amount to buy a new vehicle or to publish some books. But when it comes to 'spiritual impact' (sorry, horrible phrase), you simply can't equate dollars in with the numbers of lives or communities that will be transformed through the message of the Gospel. It doesn't work like that.

This sort of thinking can give rise to a horrible 'race to the bottom' as agencies and donors 'compete'

to see who can achieve the most 'bang for the buck'. A friend of mine was told by one funding agency that they would not work in his country, because people could be saved in another place at a lower financial cost. What? The cost for salvation was the death and resurrection of Jesus, to even think that you can put a financial tag on salvation is tantamount to blasphemy.

Sue and I live by faith because we don't know how much money we'll get this month. Donors live by faith because they generously entrust their hard earned money to other people in the hope that they will use it wisely. None of us can know or predict how God will use our time our energy or our finances; sometimes he brings amazing success and other times - for reasons best known to himself - he stretches our faith by long periods of apparent failure. It has always been so and it will continue to be so until the end of time; whatever the best practices of fund-raisers try to promise.

Any Christian agency that promises definite 'Kingdom' outcomes in return for a donation is fooling themselves and trying to fool you; avoid them.

</rant>