

The Kingdom Currency

It's All About Building Relationships

By Larry Yonker, Chuck McGinty and Devlin Donaldson

"Tell those rich in this world's wealth to quit being so full of themselves and obsessed with money, which is here today and gone tomorrow. Tell them to go after God, who piles on all of the riches we could ever manage—to do good, to be rich in helping others, to be extravagantly generous. If they do that, they'll build a treasury that will last, gaining life that is truly life."

—I TIMOTHY 6:17-18, THE MESSAGE



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"We've got a huge liability problem with all of these kids roaring through here on their skateboards. We've got to find a way to keep them out." With that remark, a monthly staff meeting at a medium-sized ministry began. What ensued was a lengthy conversation weighing the liability and safety issues, juxtaposed with a desire for community outreach. It was concluded that ultimately our responsibility as Christians is to find a way to introduce people to the gospel, meeting them where they are and not where we wish they were. A passionate staff member summed it up like this: "We need to provide a place where we can contain what they do, but at the same time engage them in relationship."

Not 30 minutes later, in another meeting convened to plan a major donor event for the ministry, another discussion broke out. Ironically, one of the most strident voices calling for the ministry to build a skateboard area for neighborhood kids began waxing eloquently about how, as Christians, we're scripturally enjoined from doing something special for major donors because we're not to treat them differently than anyone else. In fact, he argued, to do anything special for these donors would violate the teaching of James 2:1-9 where church leaders are instructed not to show preference to rich persons.

Levels of Comfort

Tony Campolo, a well-known Christian speaker and author, once said that each of us determines our own level of

hypocrisy. For most, whatever they have or earn sets the bar for what's acceptable. If we earn slightly less than someone else, we'll probably see no spiritual problems with them and their money. However, if someone has double our earning power, suddenly the issue of how they handle their money becomes very important to us.

Since organizations are made up of people, we often find ministries that embody these very same attitudes towards wealthy donors. We may not say it out loud, and probably don't teach it, but the attitude that the wealthy "owe" the organization something permeates the way we approach and engage major donors.

If some donors make "too much" or have "too many" resources, we hold a certain resentment of their success, even though we continue to cultivate them for the benefit of our ministry. Unfortunately, it's quite easy to look at these materially-blessed individuals and families, not as people, but as financial resources. Subtly and gradually, the donor is no longer seen as a fellow traveler—someone to minister to and through whom we're ministered to—but simply as a bank account that should be accessible anytime at the discretion of the organization.

Discipling Ministry

Even with the dismal performance in the equity markets over the last two years, the majority of people in our country are still much better off than they were 10 years ago. For people of faith who have acquired significant resources in these last 10 years, or for those who have diligently built substantial net worth over a longer time period, there's one ever-present question: "What does the Lord require of me?"

This question rolls through their conscious and uncon-

scious thoughts on a regular basis. And the message in 1 Timothy 6:17 is clear: we as believers are to be engaged in relationships with these wealthy people, pursuing our faith journey with them, discipling and instructing them to the answer to this question which plagues them, "How can I be a good steward of what God has given me?"

Our job, contrary to human nature, is not to judge those with wealth, but to afford them the same opportunities for involvement we offer all of the other various constituencies we serve. That is, to befriend, engage and disciple them. Our mission, should we choose to accept it, is to help these wealthy individuals understand with clarity and compassion what Jesus says to them regarding earthly wealth.

Showing Favoritism

Earlier we mentioned a person who opposed holding a major donor event, using James 2:1-13 as a justification for not doing anything that would treat

wealthy donors in any way different from average donors. In part that passage says: "If a man enters your church wearing an expensive suit and a street person wearing rags comes in right after him, and you say to the man in the suit, 'Sit here, sir; this is the best seat in the house!' and either ignore the street person or say, 'Better sit here in the back row,' haven't you segregated God's children and proved that you are judges that can't be trusted?" (James 2:1-4, *The Message*).

Looking more closely at what's being said, we see two men entering the church. The ushers judge the men simply on appearance, choosing to honor the one with expensive clothes and dishonor the other who is dressed shabbily. Does this differ at all from an event or strategy that attempts to bring wealthy people into an environment where they can be comfortable, focused and receptive to talk about their resources? We believe it's fundamentally different.

When a major donor event is carried out effectively, it's not publicly differenti-

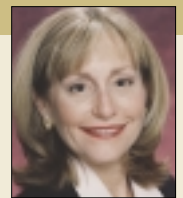
ating between believers. Rather, it's creating a private function (different from the public platform of a church) to deal with a particular issue. A person with modest resources attending a function for wealthy donors might struggle with feelings of inadequacy, frustration, envy or any number of other negative emotions. And with a mixed audience of wealthy and poor, can anyone address stewardship issues adequately and find either group open and receptive?

We adhere to Scripture's instruction, that to discriminate in a public setting based solely on wealth is sinful behavior, but to pull aside a wealthy group for a special event is fundamentally different. In every case, our intent should be to create and enhance the relationship with our donors, and to do that, we must engage in a variety of activities that meet them at their particular stage of life.

The church that differentiates based on looks is alienating individuals and impairing relationships by showing favoritism. Conversely, those who deal with segment-

New Ways to Disciple Givers

By Ann McKusick



There's an emergence of new ways to disciple givers—people who give and want to give more—where they can learn about stewardship and explore ministry directions. We can help givers by offering opportunities to learn, explore and participate in God's work.

■ **Boost "learning" by connecting givers to stewardship resources.** Daryl Heald leads Generous Giving, a new organization founded by the Maclellan Foundation. Heald has befriended development leaders, ministry CEOs and financial advisors to encourage them to host their best donors for Generous Giving events. World-class speakers like Henry Blackaby, Hugh O. Maclellan, Jr., Joe Stowell, Randy Alcorn and Ron Blue share wisdom and exegete scriptural passages about giving. In addition to these experts, there are personal testimonies from generous givers. The Gathering (www.gatheringweb.com), led by Fred Smith, Jr., is another place for Christian donors to network. It's a good place to learn, along with peers, about ministry trends, effective ways to give, and to hear from inspired Christian leaders and givers.

■ **Encourage "exploring" by educating and inspiring givers through stewardship events.** Many Christian organizations and churches have excelled in creating events to nurture giving. Probably the best known is History's Handful from The Jesus Film Project (www.jesusfilm.org), a ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ. It invites its most resourceful givers to hear about ministry direction while being challenged to give gifts of a million dollars or more. It's encour-

aging to see a new model of collaborative events being planned that expose givers to big-vision, high-impact ministry. Sat 7 is facilitating field collaboration in the Middle East that will be shared with like-minded donors from as many as nine ministries in Spring 2003. China Challenge 2002, initiated by a collaboration of China-focused ministries led by ChinaSource, will bring together ministries and givers in a shared-kingdom pursuit this October. Events like these ignite the God-directed passions of givers while exposing them to broad ministry impact.

■ **Promote "participating" by making ministry real for givers.** Often the "haves"—those with the greatest resources—are isolated from the "have-nots." Givers often have a desire to feel and identify personally with those in need but cultural divides set up real barriers to empathy and investment. Ministries at the intersection of these cross-cultural boundaries can help serve as "guides" to those who desire to be close to the front line of service. Vision trips—traveling from suburban to urban sites, from the west to the developing countries, from comfortable homes to the streets—can have life-changing impact. Women of Vision, a World Vision program, builds its volunteer force through motivating, life-changing vision trips.

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ed groups are working to enhance relationships by creating an environment of acceptance and honesty—two prerequisites for a healthy relationship.

It's in a non-threatening, accepting, peer-group environment that true relationship can be built. Staff, individually and corporately, can begin to learn about these donors, and earn the platform to speak to them passionately and convincingly about stewardship. But without creating an environment where the defenses can be laid down, relationship is non-existent, and the odds are they won't be able to hear what God has to say to them about their resources.

God's only currency is relationships and that's true regardless of the abundance or lack of material resources. If donors or partners are treated as merely bank accounts from which we can make

withdrawals, we're missing God's mark. True relationship means that you care about the issues and needs of other people, meeting them where they are, not forcing them to come to you. It also means we need to ask them how they're doing once in a while, not just tell them about our financial needs. Building a relationship takes time and effort, but it's rich in and of itself.

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." God entered into relationship, identifying with us where we are.

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Charity Navigator (www.charitynavigator.org)

Christian Money Sense
(www.bbc.edu/foundation/archives.htm)

Christian Stewardship Association
(www.stewardship.org)

Counsel and Capital (www.counselcapital.org)

Council on Foundations (www.cof.org)

Crown Financial Ministries (www.crown.org)

Eternal Perspective Ministries (www.epm.org)

Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability
(www.ecfa.org)

Generous Giving (www.generousgiving.org)

Good Sense Ministry (www.goodsenseministry.com)

International Steward
(www.internationalsteward.org)

Leadership Network (www.leadnet.org/index.org)

Maclellan Foundation (www.maclellan.net)

Ministry of Money (www.ministryofmoney.com)

National Association of Family Wealth Counselors
(www.nafwc.org)

National Christian Foundation
(www.nationalchristian.com)

No-Debt Living (www.nodebtnews.com)

Pastors.com (www.pastors.com)

Ronald Blue & Company (www.ronblue.com)

Royal Treasure (www.royaltreasure.org)

The Chronicle of Philanthropy
(www.philanthropy.com)

The Foundation Center (www.fdncenter.com)

The Gathering (www.gatheringweb.com)

The Timothy Plan (www.timothyplan.com)

For more information on links covering stewardship issues, go to Links at www.generousgiving.org.