

How God Taught Me to Give to Missions

By Dr. Oswald J. Smith

Give according to your income lest God make your income according to your giving.

I had been pastor of a large Presbyterian Church in the city of Toronto. Presently one day I resigned and became pastor of a church that knew how to give in a way I had never known.

I commenced my pastorate on the first Sunday of January. The church was holding its Annual Missionary Convention. Now I knew nothing about a convention. I had never seen one in all my life, so I just sat on the platform and watched.

The ushers were going up and down the aisles giving out envelopes. Presently, to my amazement, one of the ushers had the audacity to walk right up the aisle and hand me... the pastor... one of the envelopes. I sat there holding it in my hand. Never will I forget that moment. I can still remember it as though it were yesterday.

As I held it I read it: "In dependence upon God I will endeavor to give toward the Missionary Work of the church \$_____ during the coming year." I had never read such a statement before. I did not know that that morning God was going to deal with me and teach me a lesson that I was never to forget, and that I in turn was to teach scores of other churches all over the country in the years to come.

At first I started to pray. I said, "Lord, I can't do anything. You know I have nothing. I haven't a cent in the bank. I haven't anything in my pocket. This church only pays me \$25.00 a week. I have a wife and child to keep. We are trying to buy our home, and everything is sky-high in price." All that was true. The First World War was on.

"I know that," the Lord said. "I know you are only getting \$25.00 a week. I know you have nothing in your pocket and nothing in the bank."

"Well, then," I continued, "that settles it. I have nothing to give."

It was then the Lord spoke. I will never forget it.

"You are not asking me for what I have, Lord? Then what are you asking?" I replied.

"I am asking you for a Faith Offering. How much can you trust Me for?"

"Oh, Lord," I exclaimed, "that's different. How much can I trust Thee for?"

Now, of course, I knew nothing at all about a Faith-Promise Offering. I had never given such an offering in my life. But I knew the Lord was speaking. I thought He might say \$5.00 or perhaps even \$10.00. Once I had given \$2.00. But never more. I almost trembled as I waited for the answer.

Presently, it came. Now I am not going to ask you to believe that God spoke to me in an audible voice, but, He might just as well have done so. I was scarcely conscious of the congregation, as I sat there with my eyes closed, listening to the voice of God. God was dealing with me that morning, though I did not realize it at the time.

"How much can I give?" I asked.

"Fifty dollars."

"Fifty dollars!" I exclaimed. "Why, Lord, that's two weeks' salary. How can I ever get \$50.00?"

But again the Lord spoke and it was still the same amount. It was just as clear to me as though He had spoken in an audible voice.

I can still remember how my hand trembled as I took my pencil, signed my name and address and wrote in the amount of \$50.00.

Now, how I ever paid it I don't know to this day. All I know is that every month I had to pray for \$4.00, and every month God sent it in some miraculous way. At the end of the year I had paid the entire amount... \$50.00.

But this is what I want to make clear. I received such a blessing, there came to my heart such a fullness of the spirit, it was such a thrill, that as I paid the final amount, I realized that it had been one of the greatest experiences of my life.

So great was the spiritual blessing that had come to me because I had given a Faith-Promise Offering, I had trusted God for a certain amount, I had given in a scriptural way, that the next year at the Convention, I doubled the amount again and gave \$100. Then, at another Convention, I doubled the amount again and gave \$200. Then the church raised my salary and I received more than I had given. You see, you can't beat God giving. At still another Convention I doubled it once more and gave \$400. Then, at another Convention still, I doubled it once again and made it \$800.

From that day to this I have been increasing the amount and sending on thousands upon thousands of dollars to the Bank of Heaven year-by-year. If I had waited until I had it, I never would have given it, because I never would have had it. But I gave it when I did not have it. I gave a Faith-Promise Offering and God honored it.

A Faith-Promise Offering

Paul, you remember, got the church to promise a certain amount and then he would give them a year to pay it. As the year drew to a close, he would send Titus, or someone else, to remind the Church of the promise that had been made, so that he would not be ashamed when he arrived. Then, at the end of the year, he came and collected it. Therefore, a Faith-Promise Offering is a Scriptural offering, because it is a Pauline offering and God blesses it (2 Corinthians 8-9).

Have you ever in your life given a Faith-Promise Offering, or have you only given a cash offering? It doesn't require any faith to give a cash offering. If I have a dollar in my pocket, all I have to do is to tell my hand to go into my pocket, find the dollar, take it out and put it on the plate. I don't have to pray for it. I just give it.

But with a Faith-Promise Offering it is entirely different. I have to pray about it and ask God how much he would have me give, and then trust him for it, and month by month, go to him in prayer and asking for the amount promised, and wait upon Him until it comes in. That is the offering that brings the blessing.

That is the only kind of an offering I have taken up for Missions in all these years, well over a quarter of a century now... a Faith-Promise Offering. I would never go back to the cash offering for anything. With a cash offering I could only get a very little, but with a Faith-Promise Offering I can get much. In our Annual Missionary Convention we never got more than \$7000.00 in cash, but we get over a quarter of a million in Faith Promises.

There is many a church that will not give a Faith-Promise Offering. They are not interested in Scriptural giving. They will not obligate themselves for the definite support of their missionaries. They simply divide whatever cash comes in, between various missionary societies. They do not have to trust God for anything. If it comes in, they give it. But since there is no need to exercise faith, therefore, there is no burden, no responsibility. I do not like that kind of giving. I believe that every individual church should obligate itself in faith before God for a certain definite amount, and pray until that amount has been received.

I do not believe in pledges. I have never taken up a pledge offering in my life. What is the difference, you ask, between a pledge offering and a Faith-Promise Offering? All the difference in the world. A pledge offering is between you and a church, between you and a missionary society, and someday the deacons may come along and try to collect it, or you may receive a letter asking for it. In other words, you can be held responsible for a pledge offering.

A Faith-Promise Offering on the other hand, is between you and God. No one will ever ask you for it. No official will ever call on you to collect it. No one will ever send you a letter reminding you of it. It is a promise made by you to God, and to God alone. If you are unable to pay it, all you have to do is tell God. Give Him your excuse, and if He accepts it, you do not have to pay it.

I have gone to many a church that has been opposed to a pledge offering, but as soon as I have explained the nature of a Faith-Promise Offering, all opposition has disappeared, and those who have been most antagonistic to a pledge of any kind, have been perfectly willing to accept the plan of a Faith-Promise Offering, and God has accomplished wonders. I believe we could get all the missionary money we need if we would take up Faith-Promise Offerings in all our churches.

How can the church know how many missionaries to accept for support unless you make a Faith-Promise? You are not behind the missionary policy of your church if you do not cooperate in the program. The only men who ever become officers in the People's Church are those who are backing the world-wide missionary work of the church. II Corinthians 9:7-8, "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give, not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver, and God is able to make all grace abound toward you: that ye always having all sufficiency in all things may abound to every good work."

WHAT IT IS:

- A. It is a personal gift from you provided by God for missions (2 Corinthians 8:12).
- B. It is trusting the Lord to help you to spend less for yourself and more for reaching the world for Christ (Philippians 2:13).
- C. It is trusting the Lord to supply you with a mission offering sufficient for the task (2 Corinthians 9:7-8).
- D. It is a combined step of faith with both you and the missionary whereby both trust the Lord in giving and going (Psalms 50:14-15).

WHAT IT IS NOT:

- A. It is not a pledge (Ecclesiastes 5:4-5).
- B. It is not something that someone will come to collect (2 Corinthians 8:12).
- C. It is not a foolish step that is apart from sound business judgment and child-like faith in the Lord's power to provide.
- D. It is not a part of your regular tithes and offerings presently given to the church.