

## **KINGDOM MATH: CONCEPTS AND PRINCIPLES**

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### **Introduction**

Help for people in need can be seen on a spectrum. At one end of the spectrum is "relief." Relief helps the helpless—those who cannot help themselves—to survive. Jesus' parable of the "Good Samaritan" illustrates human aid at this end of the spectrum. At the other end of the spectrum is "development." Development helps people to help themselves and reach their full potential. The story of Nehemiah in the Old Testament illustrates development.

Spiritual, physical or social aid is not usually 100 percent relief or 100 percent development—but a mixture of both. The kind of assistance given should depend primarily on the ability of the receivers to use it to move them toward God's intentions for their full human potential.

Examples of true relief are the orphanages for abandoned newborn children and the homes for the dying founded by Mother Teresa. Newborn, abandoned children and abandoned, dying adults cannot help themselves. Abandoned babies cannot live without outside help. The abandoned dying cannot die with dignity without outside love and attention. Relief, then, does not help people develop. It helps them to survive or, in the case of the dying, to die with dignity.

True development assistance will cause those who benefit from it to do more with locally-available resources than they would have been able to do, otherwise. True development aid is a catalyst. It promotes the maximization of known resources and the discovery and utilization of new resources. Although it may use outside resources to stimulate development, it does not create ongoing dependency on outside resources to sustain basic physical and social community needs.

### **The "Down Side" of Modern Relief and Development**

Sometimes, missionaries who come from materially wealthy cultures think of the people to whom they minister as being "too poor" to help themselves. Often, the aid given by missions and/or Christian relief and development agencies depends heavily on large amounts of outside capital, technology, and trained staff to implement the technology. Often, the intent is to use whatever outside resources are necessary to make the largest impact in the shortest time possible. Often, there is not much—if any—awareness or attention given to the long-term impact on the local people. This style of intervention is similar, if not identical, to that of Western-based secular assistance programs, except that it is done by Christians. Often, there is little or no clear, intentional recognition of God's direct role as designer, enabler, and agent of change regarding the needs of the recipients.

For the local church, this has resulted in some of the following problems:

- A diversion from the biblical truth that *God* is the able and willing source of healing and that conformity to His plan is the prerequisite for healing our brokenness and meeting our needs
- An unhealthy dependency on the "outside"—a mentality of powerlessness that assumes that positive change is not possible without outside money, technology, or skilled people

- A limited understanding of the universality of the commands and blessings of stewardship, sacrifice, and servanthood—that the blessings and obligations are for the poor as well as the wealthy
- A sense that material assistance is a right, an entitlement, something that it is "owed" by those who have more—especially if aid is given inappropriately over a long period

Much assistance given in the name of development has actually disempowered people, holding them back from self-sufficiency. When assistance does not meet the relief and development criteria—for example, when relief is given but development was needed—the following will be true:

- The assistance will be counterproductive to true development.
- The aid will make future development more difficult.
- The assistance will create a sense of inadequacy to "do things on our own."
- The resources will create attitudes of dependency.
- The aid will foster such attitudes as "Why should we do this when someone else might do it for us?"

Wholistic development of a community is highly complex. Each facet of the development is interrelated with the whole. It is complicated further when people try to achieve wholistic community development using a plan developed by (and for) sinful man. Unfortunately, much development has been done without a clearly stated and practiced dependency on God. As a result, recipient people learn to look to outside people, money, and technology as the sources for meeting needs—rather than looking first to God and the resources He has given them.

There is also a "down side" if the poor do not—or are not encouraged to—love others by sacrificially investing what God has given them. If they don't, the Bible teaches that they will lose what they have and there will be reason to question their membership in the Kingdom of God.

### **The "Up Side" of Modern Relief and Development**

Fortunately, there is an "up side." Let's look at several positive characteristics when God is at the center of our development activities.

- Although the magnitude and complexity of brokenness are beyond human solution, God gives His people hope for their healing. The story of Nehemiah illustrates this principle. God is capable and willing to heal the brokenness of the people *and* their "land" (II Chronicles 7:14).
- God is eager to heal our brokenness when we meet his conditions (II Chronicles 7:15).
- The poor are not exempt from Jesus' command to love their neighbor. This can be very good news, because obedience to this command is connected to blessing.
- God provides all that is needed for the poor to meet His requirements for healing.

- God blesses the sacrificial giving of the poor. This blessing is threefold—the giver, the recipient, and God's Kingdom. When the poor give sacrificially, God seems to do "more with less."
- God doesn't do all the healing "for" us. Rather, He gives us an important role in our own healing and in the healing of others. He invites us into a partnership—He is the chief partner, and we are the assistants. As we obey, He restores our sense of dignity and worth.
- God is not limited to visible, known resources. He can make resources available that are presently unknown, at least at three levels.
- God knows about resources that we don't see. He can show us the resources, just as he pointed out fish on the other side of the boat to Peter and the other disciples.
- God can reveal to mankind how to use the resources in new ways. Oil, which was relatively useless two hundred years ago, is now a valuable commodity.
- God can supernaturally create new resources to meet human need. We call this intervention a "miracle."

### Summary

The following questions and answers summarize the "down side" of holding on to what God has entrusted to us and the "up side" of loving others with what we have.

**Question:** How did the unfaithful servant spell faith? **Answer:** F E A R.

**Question:** How did the faithful servants spell faith? **Answer:** R I S K.

May God give us all the courage to risk our resources in a demonstration of love for our neighbor—and therefore for God. If God has called you to work with people who are materially poor, may He give you the wisdom not to rob them of blessings that will come as they risk resources in obedience to Him.

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