P R A Y E R L E T T E R - J U N E 2 0 1 3

SIGNS *for Hope*

Most often I am more focused on the prayer support you give for me and Signs for Hope because it is the very lifeline for everything I do. Unless I abide in Him, I cannot know His will and "do the works (bear fruit) He has prepared in advance for me to do". I will not be able to discern what they are. Nor will I be able to accomplish anything, since "apart from Him I can do absolutely nothing". Your prayers are making the above possible, day-in and day-out. However, this mid-year Signs for Hope PrayerLetter will be more focused on the giving portion of His ministry for Signs for Hope, as vitally important as are your prayers. Charles and I wanted to give you an update on what God has provided thus far and make you aware of opportunities for you to be involved in future needs, IF and when He leads you to do so and possibly share with others, too.

You and I are fully aware, if you read the SFH PrayerLetters, or talk to me for any length of time, God is obviously causing this ministry to grow and move forward through the many God-connections and work He allows. There is no way to explain the numerous people I am connected to, in some of the most amazing ways, other than to call it what it is...miraculous!

I often wonder, why I am the one to be doing these things as I can easily list my weaknesses, my mistakes, my inabilities, and my sins. As I wonder why it is God is allowing me to be the vessel for His work the only answer I have is ... "when I am weak, He is strong". It is all of Him and it has absolutely nothing to do with me, aside from my striving to know what it is He wants to do through me and then waiting, patiently (hopefully), for Him to do it. But what you do not realize is how little it costs, monetarily, to do the vast things God is doing through Signs for Hope. When God revealed this to me, it was fascinating and humbling. Do not misunderstand me, there are many who are donating their time and their expertise to the ministry of Signs for Hope, but for this time I will focus only on the monetary aspect.

Often, we tend to measure God's blessing, His favor, on a ministry, by the amount of money that is being pledged or donated to His work. I am constantly trying to develop a "Christian World View" as opposed to a "Non-Christian World View" and that is tough, if I am not striving daily to gain His perspective on everything.

Last February 2012, when Charles and I felt God leading us to move SFH into a "full-time ministry"—meaning we would begin seeking financial supporters for His work—we searched the scriptures concerning the way God funded His work back then. As always, our God does not do something one particular way each time, but instead delights in doing things uniquely, almost every time. This provides the opportunity for us to look to Him for specifics each and every time we have a need.

Exodus 25 tells us
"The Lord spoke to Moses: Tell the Israelites to take an offering for me; from every person whose heart makes him willing you are to receive my offering"

This offering was specifically for the building of the tabernacle. The Lord did not require everyone to give, but only those who were willing. Interesting! They donated material things, their skills, and their time.

In Exodus, chapter 36, Moses had to tell the Israelites to stop giving because they gave more than was needed. Huh?!? God only wanted what was needed for the work, at hand, from those who were willing? Today, I cannot imagine any ministry asking donors to stop giving because the need had been met. We would most certainly be keeping the *extra*—in savings—for whatever it was God wanted to do next, instead of depending on Him for the next need to be provided for when it truly was needed. I am reminded here of Matthew 6:25-34, where Jesus is telling us not to worry about any of our basic needs of life, i.e., food, drink, clothing, but instead keep our focus on His Kingdom and seek His righteousness and He will take care of the rest. How are you and I doing at this? How do our lives show that we believe Him when He says this? How does this fit into our American Christian Culture? Is this the faith-life He desires for us to live, right now?

King David, in 1 Chronicles 29, uses his own example of giving to the Lord to challenge other Israelite leaders to give as deeply for the building of the temple. Before we point fingers at David for using his own acts to convince others to follow his example, God is always more concerned with the motivation of the heart. In this story, David's motives were pure and he gave clear recognition to God as being the One who has given him everything he has and ultimately the only One to receive praise for David's own heart of giving and amount of giving.

2 Chronicles 31 records the first time where more than was needed was allowed to continue to be brought…for more than 4 months. However, nothing was wasted and it was distributed across Judah in an orderly fashion. This is what was said about King Hezekiah, "*This is what Hezekiah did throughout Judah. He did what the Lord his God considered good and right and faithful."*

Nehemiah 1 & 2 gives us the example of non-believers being included in the opportunity of giving so the need can be met for the rebuilding of the Jerusalem wall and once again the need is more than met. Really, anyone can give to God's work…it all belongs to Him anyway (Deuteronomy 10:14).

The only recorded requests Jesus himself made were to feed those who were following Him. He did not ask for money, but he asked, "What do you have?" In those instances, Jesus used what was available and then asked God to multiply it. Each time the need was met, with much leftover. Do you ever wonder what they did with the 12 baskets of leftovers? I am sure they were used wisely.

I will never forget a devotional I heard, focused on these stories, given by Jill Briscoe at a Prayer Breakfast held here in Asheville about 20 years ago. The title, "What Do You Have in Your Hand?" Her point? "Whatever you have in your hand, will you let God multiply it?" I just Googled "Jill Briscoe", the website TellingTheTruth.org popped up. The first thing I saw on their family-ministry website, in bold, "NEW…Matching Grant DOUBLES Your Gift"…Donate Now." This is one of my favorite ways to be challenged to give to others. I love that my $1 becomes $2 or my $100 becomes $200. Multiplication of what they already had was how Jesus met the needs of thousands and just for one meal.

Paul shares the story of the Macedonia churches, in 2 Corinthians 8. This story fascinates and challenges me the most. *Now we make known to you, brothers and sisters, the grace of God given to the churches of Macedonia, that during a severe ordeal of suffering, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in the wealth of their generosity. For I testify, they gave according to their means and beyond their means. They did so voluntarily, begging us with great earnestness for the blessing and fellowship of helping the saints. And they did this not just as we had hoped, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and to us by the will of God.*

This giving, beyond their means, is during a time of "severe ordeal of suffering", when most of us would be so consumed with our circumstances and completely self-focused we would never think of others needs. But, instead, they had "abundant joy" in "extreme poverty" and their "generosity overflowed". Mind-boggling, isn't it?

Honestly, I believe this is how each of us should live, daily. By giving ourselves "first to the Lord and to His servants by the will of God". What a vastly different world we would be living in today, if we actually lived like this.

As we search the scriptures it is God's work, through His Holy Spirit, within us, His children, that causes us to do any and all things. "For in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). It is His love for us that must become our sole motivation, our reason for our next breath, our LIFE. If my love for God is my motivation then my obedience will be less, in my mind, since my love for God is limited by my humanness. I believe that means what we do with our hands and feet, what we speak to one another, and when we give monetarily to those who have need it is directly related to our being consumed by, obsessed with, striving to increase our understanding of, His unconditional love for us. This becomes our love in action toward one another. It is in that love, His unconditional love, we are who we are and we do what we do...period.

WE LOVE BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVED US. I JOHN 4:19

As Charles and I have taken *spiritual gift assessments* through the years we have both always scored high for the "gift of giving" (Romans 12:6-8). This allows us to be attentive to our God's leading us individually and as a couple to give regularly –the tithe—to our church and then in addition when He leads us to give beyond that, which has always been the case. The fact we both have the "gift of giving" minimizes the conflict between us and grants both of us permission, sometimes without discussion, to simply follow what the Lord leads either of us to do and when. Let me remind you, His Holy Spirit is the One who gives the gifts to build up the Body of Christ and to serve others.

Give, and it will be given to you.
A good measure, pressed down, shaken
together and running over,
will be poured into your lap.
For with the measure you use, it will be
measured to you.

Luke 6:38

While living in Winston-Salem in 1982-83, God called us to increase our tithe above the 10% and we have been faithful to continue that practice to this day. By the way, *the tithe* is what we give to the local church and all other donations are in addition to that or what are called offerings. I cannot count how many times Charles has obeyed our Lord to give, most often anonymously, to family and friends in need over the years. Our tithe and our financial commitments to other ministries have never been an option or labeled *if the money is there*, they are always the first to be paid, even before bills and done so with a cheerful heart. How can we do this? Only by the grace God has given us!

The giving "beyond our means" concept—as attributed to the Macedonia churches—has not been something Charles and I have ever experienced. However, as God has continued to open the doors for the ministry of Signs for Hope to increase and allowed Charles' business and salary to continually decline, simultaneously, I do wonder if this is God's desire for us, in the future.

I wonder…how does one give *beyond their means*? Two stories come to mind. Both involve a widow. The first widow giving ALL she had, two coins in Luke 21 and also the widow in 1 Kings 17 where after she proclaims to the prophet Elijah she is going home to cook the last meal for her and her son and then…to die. Elijah tells her to cook a meal for him first. If you do not know "the rest of the story", click the link for 1 Kings 17 and read it for yourself. God is true to His Word!

It has been such a blessing for Charles and me to watch God lay on our brothers and sisters hearts the desire to support His work through Signs for Hope even without our asking. He knows what we need before we need it! Obviously, God desires for the ministry of Signs for Hope to reach beyond us and our church to those of you He prompts to give financially and become an integral part of this ministry to deaf orphans and children around the world. I cannot begin to imagine all those, deaf and hearing souls, who will be reached for Christ because of Signs for Hope—all of us obeying God together, *doing those works He has prepared in advance for us to do* (Ephesians 2:10). If He is in this, and obviously He is, we will all be continually amazed at all He does! So thankful for each of you on this incredible journey of faith with us!

Jesus said, "All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

Report on Your Giving Financially to Signs for Hope

JANUARY - JUNE 2013

Monthly Givers (5 total)
1 Family - $100 monthly
2 Families - $50 monthly
1 Family - $30 monthly
1 Family - $25 monthly
January - June 2013 = $1,805

Single Gifts (6 total)
January – June 2013 = $2,575

Liberia February 2013 Trip Donations for the Easterlings
9 Givers - $1,465

Lifeline Children Services (Willard Adoption)
$2,212.10 (½ Becky's Travel Expenses to China in May)

Merrimon Avenue Baptist Church
$2,000 annually ($1,700 used for Bulgaria adoption trip in January)

Below are the Travel Expenses we have incurred thus far this year. As you can see Travel Expenses dominate the largest portion of the Signs for Hope annual budget.

Bulgaria Adoption Trip (January 26 - February 2)- $2,609
Liberia February 2013 Trip (February 12 - March 1) - $9,043
(Total travel expenses for Becky and Phillip & Elaine Easterling)
Summit 9 in Nashville/SFH Board Meeting – $864 (May 1 -5)
China Adoption Trip – (May 13 - 31) - $4,424
(1/2 was paid by Lifeline Children Services)
Road Trip to NJ/VA – (June 18 - 23) - $956
(Worrell, Willard, Barnes, Anderson Families; VA Baptist Conference of the Deaf)

Note: In addition to the above cash donations, there was also over $2,000 in donations of supplies for the deaf children in Liberia. THANK YOU!

As far as travel for the 2nd half of 2013, this is what we know so far.

July 20th – 25th - Joni & Friends Family Retreat, Dayton, TN
July 29th – August 10th – Liberia, West Africa
September 11th – 15th – Empowered to Connect, Houston TX
October 3rd – 6th – Together for Adoption Conference, Louisville, KY

There is the possibility of two Deaf families, if all the paperwork is completed, needing an ASL interpreter to travel with them to bring their deaf children home before the end of the year and another one early in January 2014.

If you have any questions about any of the information shared above, please just ask, beckyblloyd@gmail.com.

From My Heart to Yours …

Before I forget, I want you all to understand that the entire ministry of Signs for Hope is completely volunteer. There is no one receiving any compensation--including myself--for what we do under the auspices of Signs for Hope.

In closing, I hope I never sensationalize the needs of the deaf children to guilt others to give. To be honest, there are times I am tempted, especially when I see the convincing advertisements for the adoption of abandoned dogs and cats and realize how much money those tactics produce. While I believe the needs of the deaf children are some of the greatest in this world, I prefer for you—our brothers and sisters in Christ —to give as God directs you and from the overflow of your hearts. When we are obedient to Him, individually and collectively, is when He receives the greatest glory!

Allow me to remind you to pray for the Signs for Hope families in the midst of adoption. Many are home, but many are still planning to bring their deaf children home, soon. Transition into the "new normal" is not easy, in fact, it is life-long. Also, remember three families who are seeking God's direction for moving their families closer to Deaf schools better equipped to give their children what they need. That means selling their homes and moving to another state for all three of these families and preferably before school begins this fall. Nothing is impossible with God!

Also, pray for Charles, Vandora Henderson and me as we travel to Liberia July 29th – August 10th. This will be Vandora and my 5th trip and Charles' 2nd to Liberia since 2010. Pray we will show grace to each other, be of the same heart and mind and that we will not miss all God has planned for us to accomplish. Pray also for greater insight into the culture of our Liberian brothers and sisters and for the ability to build a stronger relationship of trust with each of them, seeking ultimately to enhance the lives of deaf children/orphans in their care.

As I close this SFH PrayerLetter edition, allow me to share one of Charles' favorite ways to pray for our children, others and us, "LORD, bless them so that they may be a blessing to others." We are praying this for each of you. There are many scriptures supporting this concept beginning in Genesis 12:2 with God's blessing of Abraham. So often, in our American minds, we tend to think of His blessing solely being related to material things, good health, & peace. What I want to challenge each of us to do is to remember what God views as a "blessing" by reading The Beatitudes. God's perspective is much different than ours, as usual. His includes our experiences, things we label "good and bad", as well. Now, take some time to think about, "What Do You Have In Your Hands?" Will you allow whatever you have in your hands to be used by God for His glory and to be a blessing to others?

Striving to seek His face and not His hands,

Becky

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Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.
Galatians 6:9