

SEEDS OF THE KINGDOM

Seed Sower Award



*The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field. Mt. 13:24
And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works. He. 10:24*

In this series, we intend to highlight the work of those who are currently busy introducing the seeds of righteousness, peace, and joy into this sin-filled earth, with the hopes that at least a few lives will receive the Word and be eternally changed. The purpose in turning the spotlight on these works is not to glorify those men and women who are actively advancing the kingdom of God, but rather to stimulate YOU, the reader, into doing YOUR part in YOUR corner. Neither is the purpose meant to be that of asking the readers to donate financially or personally participate in these projects, although that is certainly an option in some cases. Take these ideas, tweak them to fit your situation, and begin to plant the kingdom of God in your environs. The inclusion of any person or church in these articles is not an endorsement by *The Heartbeat of the Remnant* of every doctrine and practice that the spotlighted individuals or churches may represent in other areas of their life. As well, the spotlighted person/group may not endorse all aspects of *The Heartbeat of the Remnant*.

In this issue, we are going to look at a ministry to the poor. On the header of their newsletter, The Society of the Good Shepherd uses the verse from Mt. 25:40 "And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." As I have watched this ministry through the years, I really believe that this has been their heart: to minister Christ in an entire way to people who would be considered "the least of these." The following is based on an interview with David Bercot, who started this ministry.

(The Heartbeat of the Remnant) To begin with, perhaps you could tell us what the Society of the Good Shepherd is, and what you are doing in Honduras.

(David Bercot) We are a Christian ministry that makes interest-free, small business loans—often called micro-

loans—to Christians in Honduras; to either help them start a small business, or in most cases provide them with more capital to grow, since down there you cannot borrow money from a bank unless you are already wealthy.

(THR) Interesting! Where did the idea for this whole thing get started?

(DB) Well, it is interesting how it got started. It would go back to 1987. I was practicing law full-time, and my wife and I decided to take a vacation. She had been to Jamaica as a girl, and I suggested that we go there and just have some time together. So we did that. We found the first day that we didn't really like hanging around the hotel because of the rock music and beach atmosphere. Taking a walk, we ended up sitting on some boulders, and a man approached us and started a conversation. It ended up that he was a taxi driver, and so we arranged for him to drive us around the next day for X amount of dollars for the day.

The next day when he picked us up, he had to drop by his house for some reason, and we had the opportunity to see the extreme poverty that he lived in. His house was a shanty, with open drainage running close by. So we got in a conversation, as I was curious how he could ever afford to buy a taxi. It turns out that he did not own the taxi, as did none of the other taxi drivers around. The drivers would rent the car for so much a day, and at the end of the day he paid the owner his rental fee, and kept whatever profit he made—if he made any. I realized that this guy would never be able to “get ahead” by this system. There wasn’t much profit margin for the driver, just enough for him to “scrape by.”

So my wife and I got to talking, and we began to wonder if there would be a way to retire from my job and return to Jamaica and help these struggling taxi drivers and other workers with loans that they could pay back after a few years and eventually own their own taxis and break out of the grinding poverty. It wouldn’t be a handout. We saw they were ambitious, hardworking people, but the system was against them.

So we made plans to return in a few months to actually do this, but it turned out that we decided Jamaica was too tourist oriented, and we then chose Honduras.

(THR) Now when you were there in Jamaica, and you saw that scene, obviously something called compassion rose up in your heart. Had you at that point ever heard of something like micro-loans before?

(DB) At that point I had never heard of that before. Now I am not saying no one else was doing it, but that I had never heard of it myself. It just struck me how that in their situation there was no way to obtain any capital to get started. The rich would always control things. Before we went to Jamaica, I had just spent a year reading the early church writings, and had noticed how they talked about having a fund set aside to help people in prison, a shipwreck, bury the poor, or whatever; whether they were Christians or not, they were helped. Most of my life, when I thought of Christian ministry I thought in terms of evangelism. I am not downplaying that, but Jesus in Matthew 25 talked about ministering to the poor, and I wanted to get involved because this is the witness to what Christianity is all about. Jesus put this love in us, that when we are born again, we love people ...

(THR) Amen!!

(DB) ... and want to help them.

(THR) So do you believe Jesus meant it—you don’t spiritualize it—when He said what He did in Matthew 25 about the questions He is going to ask on judgment day?

(DB) I honestly do believe so. I look at Jesus as saying what He means, unless it is obviously a hyperbole. To me, it’s like the illustration that I have used before of a college

professor. He says tomorrow we are going to have final exams, and I am going to be real nice and tell you the questions. And furthermore, I am going to tell you the answers that are expected. Then all the students say, “Ah, he’s lying. That’s not what he’s going to ask. He’s going to ask other questions.” But it is crazy, because people do that exact thing with what Jesus said in Matthew 25.

(THR) So, after you started in Honduras, did the ministry grow faster or slower than what you expected?

(DB) It started off very slow. We made a lot of mistakes at the beginning. Microloans were a new thing, and we offered to work with some others who were already doing it, but some of those had unbiblical agendas like helping women start businesses to be able to be independent from their husbands. I wanted to help build strong families, not pull them apart.

In the beginning, a lot of loans we made didn’t get paid back. Now, these loans did help the people; and maybe there was sickness or something that made it so the loan didn’t get paid back, but we are not going to drag them into court or something like that. Over the years, we have learned what kind of businesses work and what will not.

(THR) As time has gone on, do you now have other people partnering with you in this ministry?

(DB) Yes, over the years others have slowly joined in, and God has taken care of all of our needs. When we posted what we were doing on the Internet, many others have found out and have joined in with us.

(THR) Amen.

(DB) The money comes in, and the needs are there. Like this rural health clinic, run by the government. The roof was leaking, with no money. They only had a one-room maternity clinic, and one certain weekend they had eleven



While the Society of the Good Shepherd focuses on microloans, they do not pass by opportunities to bless in other ways, such as fixing this needy roof on a clinic.

births, and so on. So we just published it in our newsletter and the funds came in. This was not our regular work, but something we ran into being down there.

One of the criteria that we have for helping folks—and it doesn't have to be this way, it is just that is our way of operating—is that the recipient has to be a Christian who is already putting the kingdom of God first. We help a lot of pastors, which in turn helps the whole congregation by allowing him to have a small business that his family can help him in, and then he in turn has more time for ministry.

(THR) I can't help but think of the analogy that Jesus gave us, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed."

(DB) Yes.

(THR) Now one of the things that people are often afraid



You think you are helping some poor person, but Jesus is saying "That's me!"

of in charitable ministries is dependency, or making "rice Christians." But it seems that the emphasis of your ministry is to prevent that kind of thing.

(DB) Yes. One thing is, we have not advertised. We try to keep it a "secret." We have a board of directors taken from men of local churches, Hondurans. Unfortunately, they have the unpleasant job of telling a lot of people "no." It is only committed Christians that we are helping, so there is no danger of making "rice Christians," since these are people who already have a track record. We talk to their pastors,

neighbors, etc. before we make the loan. Plus, we examine the business reality, and the need. It may be a "safe" loan, and they would be needy compared to an American, but we could maybe help someone needier.

(THR) One of the whole purposes of this "Seed Sower Award" is to inspire other people. What are some things that you see as possibilities down there, not exactly what you are doing perhaps, but ideas for others to pick up on?

(DB) Well, something that somebody else is doing, which we just learned about the last time we were down, is starting a nursing home. Now here in the U.S., that might have a bad connotation. But down there, sometimes the families don't want the elderly people, or if they need medical care, the families cannot provide it. And, there is no place for them to go; no Social Security, etc. And some of these people just wander in the streets until they die. So this man built a little nursing home and takes these people in, free of charge, where they can spend the rest of their days in a happy environment. It's nothing fancy, but it's not degrading. This is the very type of people that Jesus was talking about. You think you are helping some Honduran, but Jesus is saying, "That's me!"

(THR) That's right!

(DB) There are so many things one could do, that is just one of them.

(THR) Now, you published in your newsletter about helping to add the wing on to the rural health clinic. What was the response down there to the new wing?

(DB) Oh, wonderful! One of the things the brothers did while building was each morning one of them would give his testimony and they would share literature. So everybody knew that this was coming from Christians, and through that some even gave their life to Christ. Even the director of the project, a hard-working man who was also the mayor of the town at one time, but had no time for Christ, had a real change of attitude towards Christians. So it has been exciting to see these things. And we are not doing it to "manipulate" things, or to draw attention to ourselves. We just wanted to help the people.

(THR) Amen! What would you say is the biggest need that you have right now with your ministry?

(DB) Our ministry is flowing along very well. There is only so much that one person can do. I take care of one town, and another brother has volunteered to take care of another nearby town.

People could do this same thing anywhere. They do not have to do it through us, or we would be glad to help somebody. We are not trying to build some great big ministry.

You could pick any poor country on earth and do the same sort of thing. Even secular agencies—humanitarian aid groups—are doing microloans and finding it to be one of the most effective ways of helping the poor, rather than just giving handouts. Handouts just make people dependent, but this gives them dignity and independence.

(THR) Could you give us a close-up look at one person who has walked through one of these loans?

(DB) We have a number of excellent people, but one single lady comes to mind—Milagro. I don't know the name of her disease, but it has weakened her terribly and is extremely painful. She is really committed to Christ, and she leads ladies' Bible studies in her neighborhood. However, because of her health, she really is unable to work. Anyway, her father gave her an empty lot in the village of La Paz, where she lives. We issued her a loan so that she could build a duplex apartment there to rent out. She did that, and it worked out real well, and she paid off the loan. In cases like that, where persons prove themselves responsible, then we will make them a second loan, if there is a need. So she took out a second loan and is building more apartments. Now, she lives about an hour from the town we normally work in, so we asked her if she would be willing to be responsible to get the Society's microloan project germinated in her community. So that is how we got the other brother from Austin, Texas involved. He goes to La Paz now and works with Milagro and various pastors there. So we blessed her, and now she is involved in helping spread that blessing.

(THR) Well, praise the Lord! I think of the words of Jesus where He said that even if we give a cup of cold water in His name, we will in no wise lose our reward. I am blessed to hear this idea, which is the whole thought behind this Seed Sower Award: There are things that we can do. Jesus gave us His heart, saying that He had come to proclaim the good news to the poor, to set at liberty those in bondage, and heal the brokenhearted and similar things. It blesses me to see examples in which people can get ideas and see the seeds of the kingdom of God grow.

May God bless your ministry! It has been a blessing talking with you today.

(DB) It's been good to share with you also. ~

You can obtain more information about this ministry by writing to Society of the Good Shepherd, P. O. Box 122, Amberson, PA 17210,

Or, you can visit <http://www.scrollpublishing.com/store/newsletter.html> for a brief summary of the work.