

How to **DEFEAT**  
The Spirit of **Poverty**



STEVE PARKER

## INTRODUCTION

In 1996 God spoke to me: “I’m going to remove the spirit of poverty from Africa.”

I was surprised. Personally, I had thought that there was no hope for Africa to escape its poverty. I discussed this word with only a few people because the confirmation was difficult to verify. Each person seemed to feel that it was from the Lord.

In 1997 I heard a report on the BBC radio which said that the year 1996 had been the first year since the independence movement of the 1960’s that the economy in Africa had seen a positive growth. For me this was another confirmation of the word that I had received.

Since then I’ve had many other confirmations. There are new techniques and methods of husbandry and agriculture that are very encouraging. In the political domain there is a movement to erase all the external debts of African countries to the West. This “Jubilee 2000” movement has the support of conservative politicians and religious leaders alike.

There are also other confirmations, but the most important are found in the Bible. In 1999 I began to read the Word of God with new eyes. God not only gave the prophetic word but a Biblical method of applying it.

In the following chapters I will share with you, dear reader, the riches of the Word of God that He entrusted me with. If you understand, believe, and put into practice the lessons in this book, I am confident that you will see a great transformation in your life. Nearly every day I meet people who give me their testimonies of what God has done for them through this teaching.

Churches have seen their offerings increase dramatically, pastors have gotten support, and individuals have gained employment and new business opportunities. But the greatest result is the improved spiritual life. Those who have been delivered from the spirit of poverty have a new

confidence, joy, strength and anointing. They are winning souls to the Lord, giving to the poor and engaged in the work of the Lord.

The African continent is the poorest in the world. God loves the blacks the same as the others. Is it possible that there is a spirit of poverty who has stolen from the Africans? But why does he linger there? Is it possible to chase it out of Africa? I believe so!

If poverty were simply material, one could attack it with material weapons. If the problem were only the lack of money, one could resolve it with financial aid alone. However, if the problem is spiritual, it is impossible to attack it with material things.

Since the 1960's, the governments and financial institutions of the West have declared a "war on poverty" in Africa and elsewhere, claiming that they would eliminate hunger. After nearly forty years of aid, and hundreds of billions of dollars spent to construct roads, provide clean water, build schools, etc., these financial institutions commissioned a study to evaluate the results of their "war on poverty." They found that, in spite of all these efforts, Africans were poorer than before!

Part of the money went into Swiss bank accounts, another part for buying armaments, some to sustain nationalized companies, etc. No doubt much of this money was used in genuine attempts to help the poor, but still they became poorer than before! It is not my intention to criticize African governments. Some have tried hard in the face of incredible difficulties. However, you can never conquer the spirit of poverty with worldly goods. Instead of *defeating* it, the West actually *fed* that spirit! Now it has become stronger and more demanding!

How then can we conquer it? I have some very good news for everyone who believes. God has given us powerful weapons for destroying it. Have no doubt whatsoever. You can come out of poverty and you can lead your friends to freedom as well. As the children of Israel came out of Egypt, we also can make our "exodus" from the spirit of poverty.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF BALANCE

Proverbs 11:1 says, **“A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight.”** In this study of the battle against the spirit of poverty, it is crucial to maintain balanced teachings. The Bible does not only say that a false balance is not good; it is an *abomination* to the Lord God. We must pay close attention if we want to please the Lord in all things. We must handle this subject with care because it is very delicate, with there is great spiritual warfare surrounding it because of its importance.

There are many teachers who twist the Word of God by extreme doctrines. For example, some teach a “prosperity doctrine”, emphasizing the promises of blessing in the Bible, but neglecting the promises of suffering mentioned in the same Bible.

The “prosperity doctrine” is a false balance because all the weight is put on one side. This doctrine doesn’t seem to acknowledge the purpose of trials in the Christian life or the sufferings that one must endure in spreading the good news of Jesus. We must be ready at any moment to suffer for Jesus. The prosperity doctrine implies that all Christians should be rich. If they go through hard times they must have sinned. It often judges someone’s spirituality based on how much they possess, whereas Jesus said that our life does not consist of that (Luke 12:15).

A person who lives by prosperity doctrine might for example have a Mercedes with good air conditioning. But if you tell him there is a village in the bush that needs the Gospel and has no roads by which one can reach it by car, he will refuse to go because he thinks that it is not the will of God for him to walk 15 kilometers in the sun! His god is only a god of blessings and not of sufferings, even for the sake of the gospel.

At the other extreme are teachers who emphasize suffering and spirituality only and ignore God’s promises of provision. They teach that God loves the poor and it is His will that they stay poor. They imply that all

the promises of God are for the age to come and that there are no promises for the present age.

In this chapter we will learn that the Word of God teaches the subject of poverty, its causes and cures, in a balanced way. Material prosperity does by no means take the *first* place in the Christian life, but neither does the Bible *neglect* this aspect. On the contrary, scripture has very much to say about the Christian financial life.

**“Give us this day our daily bread.”** (Mathew 6:11) The Lord’s prayer is a model prayer for us who are the disciples of Jesus. The Lord has given a place in this prayer to material needs, but it was not the first request.

Jesus first says: **“Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name!”** (v 9) The glory and reverence of the Father comes first. Our spiritual life and our relationship with God should be the highest priorities in our Christian lives. Jesus then prays: **“Thy Kingdom come! Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”** (v 10)

After requesting these two things Jesus mentions the daily bread. The Lord’s prayer teaches us that our material needs have a regular place in our prayers after worship and His Kingdom and will. A pastor once told me, “I cannot pray for money when I spend time with God.” He believed he could pray for lost souls, for the love of God, but not for material things. But **Jesus Himself prayed for daily bread!**

Sometimes we can be too spiritual, even more “spiritual” than Jesus—for Jesus Himself saw the necessity of praying for the bread. We are in a natural world. We are spirits but we live in an earthly body. We should not ignore the realities of our daily lives on the earth because the Lord Himself did not ignore them.

**“Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth, there is no one who, having left, because of Me and because of the gospel, his house, his brothers, or his sisters, or his mother, or his father, or his children, or his lands, who will not receive a hundred fold, now in this present age,**

**houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and lands, with persecutions, and, in the age to come, eternal life.”** (Mark 10:29-30)

Jesus clearly taught that there are promises for **“this present world”** and others for **“the world to come.”** We must recognize that *both* have a place in balanced teaching. We cannot ignore either one.

The Lord Jesus promised material provisions for the believers who will leave everything for Him and for His gospel. I can testify that these promises are true. Since I left my family to go to Africa as a missionary, I have received the provision of which Jesus spoke. I have had more than 100 mothers who have prepared succulent meals for me. I have slept in more than 100 homes as a guest. I have seen that God’s provision is many times what I left behind for the gospel. I have had thousands of brothers and sisters that I had never met before I left.

For when are these promises? **“Now in this present age.”** In heaven we will not need a hundred houses nor a hundred lands, etc. However right now on this earth we have a job to do for Jesus and this job requires material resources. If you preach in a village you need someone there that can give you a blanket for the night, a meal, drinking water, etc. You also need transportation to get there. In heaven we will have spiritual bodies and we will not need means of transportation!

Jesus did *not* say, however, that these things would come without a fight. He says that these things come **“with persecutions”**(v. 30). Yes, dear reader, there are persecutions also in this present age. We must suffer for His glory.

Jesus promises eternal life for the age to come, which is a thousand times more important than this present age. **It is useless to possess everything in this age then afterwards to go to hell.** Sometimes I ask myself why there are any promises at all for this life here below. The reason is that it pleased Him to do so. We cannot pick and choose which passages we will believe.

There are extremes on both sides, but God teaches us the right balance that pleases Him, in His Word. The extreme prosperity doctrine is on one side and the doctrines that neglect the promises and blessings of God are on the other. Both are false balances and abominations to God

Matthew 6:32-33: **“For all these things the gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you.”**

Here we have another good example of the balance of Jesus our marvelous teacher! The unbelievers seek *things*, whereas the believer seeks *one thing*. The unbelievers seek first of all the things of this world in order to satisfy their desires. The believers seek first of all the kingdom of God and His righteousness in order to be pleasing to Him. Jesus clearly taught that the believer must seek for but one thing, the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and that the other things (material needs) will be given him without their having been *sought* (they may still be worked for and believed for)! **The Father knows that we need earthly things also.**

Therefore the unbelievers seek the things, whereas the things seek the believers! Proverbs 8:20-21 says, **“I walk in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of justice, to endow those who love me with wealth, that I may fill their treasures.”** Wisdom walks through town looking for those who love her so that she can give to them. My brothers and sisters, it is not necessary to search for these things because they are searching for you!

To be sure, material needs do not occupy the first place our lives, yet they do have a place in God’s program. Jesus did not say that if you seek first the kingdom that *some* things would be added to you. Nor did He say that if you seek first the kingdom of God that *half* the things you need would be given you. No! Rather, He says that **“all these things”** will be added unto you.

So we see the perfect balance in the teachings of Jesus. I have used only three verses from the Gospel of Matthew because it is proper to show at least two or three passages in order to establish an important teaching such as this. We are all human and therefore fallible; I cannot say that my teaching is in perfect balance. Each of us will tend to err on one side or the other, however slightly. Only Jesus is perfect. I sincerely hope that you will read and re-read the scriptures and see the balance of the Word on this subject.

## Summary

God has given *material* promises and *spiritual* ones also. He has given promises for *this life* and ones for the *coming one* also. He has given promises for our *earthly* lives and for *heaven* as well. It is not a sin to ask God for our daily bread and other earthly needs as long as we seek primarily His kingdom. If you have left everything for the good news, it is not a sin to believe that God will provide all you need to work for Him!

## WHAT IS THE SPIRIT OF POVERTY?

The Bible says in Proverbs 10:15 that **“the ruin of the poor is their poverty.”** Poverty is not a blessing, as any poor person will tell you, but rather a “ruin.” That is to say, a curse. This is why, in the books of Moses, poverty is often included in the list of curses that come upon those who disobey the law. I have heard some well-meaning people say that poverty is a blessing because it helps people to be humble and good. However, I have never heard a truly poor person, one who cannot meet his obligations and basic needs, say this. It is typically we who have plenty who say this!

Proverbs 6:11 says, **“And your poverty will come in like a vagabond, and your need like an armed man.”** Poverty is not passive. It is dangerous and violent like the devil. I believe that this sort of poverty is not normal, but is diabolic, and arises because certain conditions have permitted it to enter. The devil is described in the Bible as a devouring lion who roams about looking for someone to devour. This is also how the

spirit of poverty is described in this verse. The devil is also described in scripture as being armed with weapons, just like the poverty in this verse is described as being **“like an armed man.”** Elsewhere in scripture the devil is said to use **“fiery darts”** or **“flaming arrows”** to attack.

Poverty is also compared in this verse to a **“vagabond.”** A vagabond is not a condition, but rather a living being! The Lord spoke to Satan and demanded, **“From where do you come?”** Satan answered by saying, **“From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it.”** Satan is a “vagabond!” We need protection against him.

John 10:10 says, **“The thief does not come except to steal, to kill and to destroy.”** The first job listed by Jesus for the thief (Satan) is to **“steal.”** It is my conviction that the poor are not so by accident. The spirit of poverty, that is to say, the devil, has robbed them.

Malachi 3:11 says, **“Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it may not destroy the fruits of the ground.”** The prophet, speaking by the Holy Spirit, says that there is a **“devourer.”** Again, this devourer is not a condition, but a personality, here pictured as a kind of insect, but actually a spirit. The Israelites were in want because of a force that was, with full permission of God, against their prosperity! It is a curse if the Lord allows a spirit of poverty to steal and destroy our profits.

**“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds.”** (2 Corinthians 10:4) If the devil has constructed a fortress, we can without doubt demolish it if we know how to use the weapons of Jesus Christ!

## Summary

The Bible talks about a devourer that destroys fruits, a vagabond and armed man that suddenly can come upon us, and a thief who has come to steal from us. Not all poverty is merely a condition of the lack of money and things. Some poverty definitely has spiritual causes behind it. If we attack it with human and material resources alone we will

surely fail. We must treat it as a dangerous spiritual enemy that brings ruin to the poor.

## THE NORMAL LIFE

The doctor needs to know the conditions of the normal life of the patient. He knows that the normal body temperature is 98.6° F or 37° C. If a patient has a temperature of 103° F, or 40° C, he knows that this is not normal; the patient has a fever, and perhaps more.

What is the normal financial life of the Christian? We can compare our current condition with the normal one to evaluate if there is really a sickness. Thanks be to God that we have abundant references in the scriptures to the normal life of a believer! Let us not compare ourselves with our neighbors since they may well be abnormal. Rather, let us look into the mirror of the Word of God to see how we really are. The only valid standard is God's.

Psalms 23:1-2 gives us an excellent image of the normal life according to the experience of David. **“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures.”** Green pastures are normal. David did *not* say that it is normal to *always* be in the green pastures. He probably passed through all kinds of pastures, but he didn't *lie down* there!

It is normal to have difficulties, trials and sufferings, but if you are continually having problems this is not normal. A good shepherd may lead his flock *across* the desert with the idea of getting it to a good destination. However he would not make the flock *lie down* in the desert. It is just not normal to lie down in dry ground.

I had a friend in Zaire who was named Cornelius. I saw him one day in town, and greeted him. “Hi! Have you found work yet?” “No,” he said, “not yet.” Since he had been a long time without a job, I was surprised. He had a lot of qualifications and an excellent character. Without thinking, the words came out of my mouth, “Who is leading you? The Good Shepherd leads his sheep to green pastures where they lie down. Who

then is leading you to the brown pastures?” I noticed his countenance drop a bit and I was sorry for what I had said, hoping I hadn’t discouraged him.

Some days later he knocked on my door. Immediately when I saw him I recognized that he was different. He grinned broadly and his face shined. He explained to me how he had been hurt by the word I had given him that day, and how he went directly to his house afterwards to fast and pray for three days.

During the fast he prayed with all his heart, “Jesus, did *You* lead me to this dry pasture? From now on I ask *You* to lead me and I will follow. It’s not important whether I have a job but I must know if *You* are leading me and whether I am following.” He committed himself to be led by the Lord, no matter what.

At the end of the three days’ fast he ate and then went out into the street to walk. There he ran into a certain Belgian man who recognized him and asked, “Are you the Cornelius who teaches English? I need lessons. How much do you charge per hour?” Cornelius responded, “The charge is five dollars per hour.” (This represented about twenty times the local hourly wage for a laborer at that time in Zaire.)

The Belgian man was surprised. “Only five? That is a good price. In our country English lessons are very expensive. I have a friend who also needs the lessons. Can he study also for the same price?” Cornelius eagerly replied, “Yes, he can have the same price.”

The Belgian was pleased. “If we study together for *many* hours will the price remain the same for each hour?” Cornelius could hardly contain his joy. “Yes, each of you would pay only five dollars an hour, no matter how many hours you study.”

A good wage for the average worker was about two dollars per day. Cornelius began to earn many times that amount. He had been hurt when I had asked, “Who is leading you?” But after his repentance he was completely filled with blessings. He could honestly say he was ly-

ing in green pastures. Eventually those Europeans who hired him left the country, but his blessings continued. He found work with for an international aid organization that gave him a good salary, security and benefits; he also began a youth ministry that has touched the lives of many students in our town and has visited the prisons to minister and distribute food.

If you are lying down somewhere other than in green pastures, get up! Don't stay there. Your condition is not normal. Keep walking until you arrive where the Lord wants you to rest.

**“Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.”** (3 John 2) God is a good God. He loves His children. If you are the “beloved” then this word is for you. Do not think that God wants anyone’s life to be continual poverty and distress.

The words of John and David indicate it is God’s will for you to have a prosperous life, generally speaking. To defeat the spirit of poverty we must be convinced this is God’s will. Notice that the scripture says, “in *all* things.” The Word did not speak of a *partial* prosperity “in *some* respects,” but rather in *all things*. This may seem extreme, but the words are God’s, not mine.

The Bible teaches that we should have at least two or three witnesses to confirm testimony. We have already seen what David and John have to say. Let’s look now at other servants of the Lord who wrote about the normal life.

Paul wrote in Philippians 4:19, **“And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”** This is a promise for our financial lives. Paul’s God, that is, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, shall provide! He did not say that He perhaps *might* provide. He *shall* provide!

The normal life for the believer is not to search with his own strength for money. Neither is it necessary for him to lie, cheat or steal to get it.

There is another way. God shall *provide!* “*All (not some) of your needs*” is the promise. **Is it possible that God could provide all your needs?**

**“Nor was there any among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.”** (Acts 4:34) What was it like in the first church at Jerusalem, founded and led by the apostles? There were not *any* that lacked. This church is a model for us of revival, teachings and power. Luke tells us that among these first Christians there were *none* that lacked. Amazingly, this was before the invention of automobiles, computers and all the things we think are necessary. God was able to provide through the church and other ways.

In the normal, model church there were none that lacked. It was the same way when Moses wrote by the Holy Spirit about the Promised Land the Lord was bringing His people into. **“except when there may be no poor among you; for the LORD will greatly bless you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance, only if you carefully obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe with care all these commandments which I command you today.”** (Deuteronomy 15:4-5) Not only in the early New Testament but also in the Old Testament “church” the promised normal life, barring disobedience, was a people greatly blessed, without any lacking.

In our young church in Nairobi we had a prayer meeting one Wednesday. I asked if anyone needed a job. Our congregation lived in a very poor section of town full of unemployment, so I was stunned that no one in the group was jobless except one teenage girl. We prayed for her and told her to believe that she had already received a job. She said that she did. After the meeting we all went home. The girl met a lady on the way walking home who stopped her and offered her a job in her house. Before even reaching home she already had work!

Jesus said, **“Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.”**

(Mark 11:24) The normal life involves of praying with faith and trusting in God's promises before seeing any evidence of an answer. If you have read the Word of God and are convinced that it is His will for you to have a job, you can believe and receive.

John also said, **“Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.”** (1 John 5:14-15) There can be no doubt that it is God's will for us to have a job, a productive role in this world. Therefore we can pray with confidence, and the promise is that He hears us and that we know that we have the petition that we have asked of Him.

God is good and He loves us. We must pass through times of testing and crisis from time to time. To be sure, we experience dry seasons. However, this is not the normal condition. We should usually experience abundance.

Psalms 1:3 says, **“He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also does not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.”** In his season he bears fruit, and the seasons come regularly for him. If *every* season is dry, that is not normal. Whatever the righteous does shall prosper unless there is some other reason.

Jesus Christ said that if you give regularly, people will give to you and you will have abundance. **“Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.”** (Luke 6:38) He did not say that you would be given *sufficient* for your needs, but that it will be *“running over.”*

David said pretty much the same thing in Psalms 23:5: **“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over.”** David's cup, and the normal cup, was

not only full. It ran over. Does your cup run over? According to David, a man anointed to speak the Word of God by the Spirit, the model life is an overflowing one. The table is prepared before you. Come and dine!

God's giving and men's are different. When a man gives to you, usually he gives you just enough for your immediate need. He measures things to determine how much to give. God is completely different. His giving is abundant, more than enough. Once he has filled your cup He doesn't stop. He keeps pouring into your cup until it overflows.

God created an earth so rich that we can all live in abundance. He created billions of stars, many more than we need to get light at night. He has put so many tons of gold under the ground that it will never be mined. He has put water enough in the seas and rivers that we could never exhaust it.

God gives us even the Holy Spirit in abundance, more than a man can contain. Jesus said that whoever believes on Him, "**out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.**" (John 7:38) Who is able to drink a river? But Jesus gives, not only *a* river, but also "rivers!" What abundance!

Why then have abundance? Some ask the question, "If you have enough for your own needs, why do you need or want abundance? Isn't that arrogant and covetous?" This is a good question. First, let it be said that it pleased God Himself to do it this way and that is His business if He wants to give abundantly. He is rich and all-wise and does what He wants. He has His reasons and it is very dangerous for us to edit the scriptures or doubt them according to what seems best to us. Our part is simply to accept it.

Having said that, there are other important reasons He has given us for abundance. First, He wants to show us how much He loves us and how good and generous He is. He does it to bless us. "**I will make you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great; and you**

**shall be a blessing.”** (Genesis 12:2) God says, **“I will *bless* you.”** He has promised to do so and does it to fulfill His Word abundantly.

There is another very important reason why He pours blessings in abundance on us rather than mere sufficiency. That is that He wants us to be a blessing to others. He wants us to bless all the families of the earth. **“I will bless those who bless you and curse him who curses you. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”** (Genesis 12:3) Through the Gospel of Jesus Christ we are to bless all the families of the earth. This means we need resources to do that. We need not only enough to feed our own families, but enough to send the church planters to every tribe and tongue, and to feed the poor of the world and clothe the naked in Jesus’ name! That job requires a *lot* of abundance.

We can’t have our eyes only on our own needs. A pregnant mother-to-be eats more than enough for her own needs because she must feed the baby also. When your cup runs over, your neighbor can come with his cup and catch the runoff. You can invite him to drink with you. If you have only enough for yourself, how will you bless others? When we have rivers we can easily spray the dry places. The most important work is spreading the Good News of Jesus. With the abundance we can support evangelists, build church buildings, print literature and buy sound equipment.

What is the reason that God gives wealth? **“And you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day,”** (Deuteronomy 8:18) The power to get wealth is not given at *random* or without a purpose. Here we are told clearly that the power to get wealth is given *in order to establish* the covenant sworn to the fathers. What is that covenant? It is given in the scriptures we just read in Genesis 12 and can be summarized this way: God will bless you and through you bless all the families of the earth.

There are two ways one can be out of balance on this. The first is to believe that God only gives wealth to bless *us* more and more. The other

is to believe that God only gives wealth to bless *others through us*. Neither of these is correct. The truth is that God gives the wealth to bless *us* and *also* to bless the nations *through us*. There are still thousands of tribal families in the earth that have not yet been blessed through the children of God. The missions to these unblessed (unevangelized) peoples are intended to be funded by this power to get wealth that God has given according to Deuteronomy 8:18.

We are the children of Abraham by faith in Jesus Christ. God wants to bless all the families of the earth through us, but that requires finances. One cannot realistically go to Niger to preach the Gospel, for example, without money for such things as a visa, air fare, food while there and lodging.

Therefore, the abundance God gives believers is to support the work of God. He wants us to pay for the evangelization of the world. No ruler sends his soldiers to war without providing their needs while on the battlefield. God would not send us into the world to preach the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ without providing for all our needs.

**“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.”** (Psalms 23:1) Holding onto such promises as this I can go anywhere in the world with confidence that God will provide! Also I can give my money to the servants of God, knowing that my needs also will be met because God is rich and He gives enough not only for me but also enough to give liberally.

**“For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, that flow out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing;”** (Deuteronomy 8:7-9) Here we have the plan of God for the children of Israel in the land of promise. It was a land of abundance, like the garden of Eden. One kind of fruit should have been sufficient, but God does all things in abundance and variety. He put so many different kinds of fruits here in the earth that no one will ever taste them all.

We have seen the normal life of blessing that God has promised, but what does the Bible say about the times when the economy is in recession and circumstances would tend to scarcity? What if His people live in a land where the weather is not good this year? Does God have a plan for when the farmers don't get the conditions they want? Certainly! **“The LORD knows the days of the upright, and their inheritance shall be forever. They shall not be ashamed in the evil time, and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied.”** (Psalms 37:18-19)

God has a plan for the days of famine also! Our blessings do not depend on this world. The promises of God are sure in every country, every year, and in every economic cycle. In the **“evil time”** the promise is ever sure and in the days of famine it is normal for the child of God to be satisfied. Do not be confused. **Our God is faithful in every season!** Just as the provision does not depend on economic or weather conditions, neither does it depend on other people. Even if people don't want to help us, God will still help us. If people oppose us, we are blessed anyway. The Lord prepares a table before me **“in the presence of my enemies.”** The adversaries cannot stop us from getting our blessings even in their presence. They can only watch our table.

Is it normal that there be exceptions to the promises of God to the righteous? Human wisdom would say that for every rule there is an exception. Are some people excluded? David lived a long life and knew thousands of people and therefore had enough experience to tell us the answer. **“I have been young and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread. He is ever merciful, and lends, and his descendants are blessed.”** (Psalms 37:25-26)

David never saw an exception to the rule. He never saw the righteous forsaken. The godly man is merciful and lends and even his children are blessed. It is not normal for a parent to be unable to feed his children. If David never saw them having to beg bread then neither will we.

Those who are rich in this world often seem to be the most unhappy. Wealth does not give happiness. Those whom the *Lord* has made wealthy, however, have joy. The worries and sadness that accompany riches are not the portion of the just. **“The blessing of the LORD makes one rich, and He adds no sorrow to it.”** (Proverbs 10:22) Thank God *no sorrow* comes with the riches that are His blessings! Those blessed in this way have their joy in Jesus and not in uncertain riches so they don’t fear losing them.

The Bible says that the Word of God is like water. We can see our own reflections in the Word. If we do not see generosity, abundance and joy we ought to repent and turn to God for healing and grace. He will forgive us and show us how to live according to His will for us.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the best (perfect) example of normal living. Jesus is normal. He never amassed riches for Himself but He was generous towards others. In His death He was with the rich in a very costly tomb. Soldiers divided one of His garments and gambled for others because they had value. When He needed to pay His taxes, the fish brought a gold coin in its mouth not only to pay His but also His friend’s taxes. He fed 5,000 persons at a time. When He needed transportation to cross the lake or to ride into town it was there on time, whether a boat or a donkey.

A group of many women followed Him to assist the team from their own wealth. One of these women was Jeanne, wife of Chuza, steward of Herod the king!(Luke 8:3) Jesus did not worry about finances since He didn’t love money and trusted His Father in heaven to supply the needs of the team. Even when Judas was stealing from the moneybag Jesus did not stop him though it seems He must have known. Jesus is our example. He had enough to feed the poor as well as Himself and His team.

## Summary

We must transform our mind to know what is normal living. We should be generally prosperous, having abundance for the purpose of blessing

others and so that we are not a burden or a bad testimony. Characters in both the Old Testament and the New Testament church were promised and then experienced these blessings without exception. We should normally pray with faith and receive what we need. Unlike worldly prosperity, no sorrow, worry or hoarding should accompany our blessings.

This normal life does not depend on circumstances or people. We will not always be in “green pastures”, because trials must come, but every season should not be a trial. Jesus is our example, who suffered testing, but who always had food, transportation and provision for His team and for what the Father had called Him to accomplish. He thought of others first and lived to give, without amassing for Himself. He is the model for us of a normal Christian. We can look at the characteristics of a normal, generous life and ask ourselves if we are in normal health.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF CONFESSING OF THE WORD OF GOD

When we teach this subject, “How to conquer the spirit of poverty” in churches, the students are required to confess the Word with their mouths many times during the course of an evening’s lesson. For example, when we deal with the verse: **“And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus,”** every person in the room must turn to his neighbor and say: “My God shall supply all your needs.” Each one then turns to someone else and says: “My God shall supply all my needs.”

Our students in a seminar may be required to confess as many as 20 or 30 verses in each 90-minute session. I believe that this is one of the secrets of the amazing number of deliverances and transformed lives we have seen through this course. Jesus said, **“For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will come to pass, he will have whatever he says.”** (Mark 11:23)

Note that Jesus did not say: “Whoever *thinks* about this mountain..” That would not be sufficient. One must say it with the mouth. The confession of the mouth is very important. Even salvation itself cannot be obtained except by confessing that Jesus is Lord and believing in the heart that God the Father has raised Him from the dead. Thinking that Jesus is Lord doesn’t save you. If we will not confess Jesus before men then He will not confess us before His Father.

While you are reading this book, pause from time to time and confess the scripture promises out loud. If someone else is in the room, turn to them and say, “You will lack nothing. You will not be forsaken.” If any verse in this book touches your heart and you know that it is true and that it is for you, stop and confess it aloud. Now say also, “I will lack nothing. I will not be forsaken

When you read Psalms 23:1, “**The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want,**” say to someone, “You shall not want.” Then say to someone, “I shall not want.” That is to say, speak these blessings over yourself and over others also.

Dear reader, I want you to be completely freed from the spirit of poverty if you have it in your life. That is why I use an admittedly annoying method of having you repeat phrases aloud. However I am not trying to make this teaching pleasant but rather effective. I know that if you want the full effect of this teaching you must confess it out loud. From time to time I have some in the seminar that are reluctant or lazy to actually say the verses out loud. These same ones tend to be those who do not experience the transformations and testimonies of the others who applied themselves. If you read this book without confessing the verses you will miss something big and this could become an intellectual exercise rather than a life-changing encounter with God.

We recently held this seminar in a church in Boulmiougou, outside Ouagadougou, in Burkina Faso. At the end we prayed for those who needed jobs. Among them was a man who had been for six years jobless, though educated. He took home the list of verses used in the

course and read them aloud morning and night. After a week he was called to the Hotel Independence, the most prestigious hotel in the country, and given the position of chief buyer for the hotel and restaurant. The interesting thing is what they said when he showed up: “Where have you been all this time? We’ve been looking for someone like you for a long time!” Even more amazingly, at the same time the man was also offered another job! What are the odds against being without work for six years and then being offered two jobs at the same time? He had to throw one of them out due to abundance, whereas he had been in total lack.

Consider the lady that Jesus healed, who kept saying to herself, **“If only I may just touch His garment, I shall be made well.”** If she had kept saying instead that others get all the blessings, I doubt she would have seen the miracle come to her. She agreed with God’s Word. God can work with those who agree with Him and are not resisting His will for their lives.

**“Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.”** (Proverbs 18:21) There are those who search far and wide for their miracle, although it is not far away at all. The Bible says that it is near you, in your mouth and in your heart. It is the Word of God.

A good doctor gives medicine to his patient and tells him to take it several times a day or until the symptoms have disappeared. I would like to do the same thing with the verses of scripture in this book. Morning and evening repeat several promises until the symptoms of the spirit of poverty have disappeared! This is not the only key to overcoming, however. There are many other factors that we will study as we go on in this book.

## SYMPTOMS OF THE SPIRIT OF POVERTY

A good doctor is able to recognize the signs and symptoms of the most common illnesses. If someone comes with a headache, fever, chills and diarrhea, he knows that it is probably malaria (in Africa). When some-

one for no apparent reason loses a lot of weight and is susceptible to sickness he could have AIDS.

Likewise, it is necessary for us to understand the signs of the spirit of poverty in order for us to help someone else to resolve their problem. We can also use these symptoms to diagnose it in ourselves.

Thanks be to God the Bible is full of teachings on the symptoms of the spirit of poverty. The first thing I want to emphasize is that not every “poor” person has the spirit of poverty, in the same way that not every person with a headache has malaria. The Bible talks about a spirit of infirmity, but not every sickness is caused by it. In the same way, many people have very little money but yet do not have that spirit of poverty. They are joyful, generous and obedient to the Word.

Why then is it important to discern the spirit of poverty? If someone is simply “poor”, isn’t the problem the same, whether a spirit of poverty causes it or not? THE ANSWER IS NO! The problems are completely different and are therefore treated differently. If a person simply lacks money, you can help by giving some groceries or paying the heating bill. If he just needs a job, you can help him look for one. However, if he has a spirit of poverty, the solution is different. You first need rid him of it. Otherwise, even money will not help the person.

One very common sign pointing to a spiritual problem is a pattern of continual difficulties that just are not normal. Job had great trials for a period and then was restored to his former place of blessing. If your life has unexplainable blockages in it then take a look to find the underlying cause. As we said, green pastures are the norm. If you have never had a lengthy period of “laying down” in the goodness of God’s provision then something is amiss.

I have found that the quickest way to discern the spirit of poverty is to listen to the person’s confession. Jesus said that we speak the things that fill our hearts; therefore if you want to know what is in the heart of a person, listen to what comes out of their mouth. It often doesn’t take long to see identify the problem is.

For example, I met a young man who told me that said he could not evangelize because he did not have the equipment and transportation. If he only had a sound system he could do something, but since he didn't he couldn't do anything. He continued to bemoan all the things he didn't have. He never mentioned anything he had that God had blessed him with, although all of us have for sure been blessed with so many things we could list if we wanted. I asked him if it was possible that he had a spirit of poverty and he replied, "Yes, I do."

An important symptom of the spirit of poverty is the continual confession of poverty. This person always reminds people that he is poor. He talks about the things that he does not have. Even if he has a nice shirt and good pair of pants he cannot mention them. He prefers to think and talk of what he lacks instead of what he possesses.

When I was a missionary in Nairobi, Kenya, in the mid-80's, another missionary sent me a camera, asking that I give it to a certain handicapped man who sat in the market selling soft drinks. The idea was that with this camera the man could earn his living, as many do in Kenya, by taking pictures for people. This camera was very sophisticated, much better than my own personal one. When I found the man and gave him the camera from his friend, I was surprised by the reaction. I expected him to be happy to receive a gift like this from the kindness of his friend. But after the initial joy of receiving the camera, he noticed that it did not have a flash attachment, and was unhappy. I tried to encourage him that he could take daylight photos outdoors and have some customers, but he would not be comforted.

You can have many things and yet be discontent because of what you don't have. Some will not give to God from what they have because they think about what they don't have. If you say, "I am poor," you may be permitted to remain in that condition as a result.

Another symptom is the lack of gratitude. An ungrateful person doesn't say "thank you" because he thinks that people are somehow obliged to help him. He complains. He is never satisfied. Even if he dresses well

and has good legs to walk he will say, “I don’t have a bicycle.” If he has a bicycle he says, “I don’t have a motor bike.” If he has one he will say, “I don’t have a car like my brother’s.” If he has a car he says it is not as big and powerful as other people’s. He compares himself with others who have more. He forgets that he has things that many others don’t have, who may be blind or lame.

People with the spirit of poverty like to talk about other people and how much they have. “That man there, he has the money, you know,” one man said to me. “Have you seen that big car of the pastor? He really has the money that one. I wonder where he gets it?” The Bible says to rejoice and be glad and give thanks for the things *you* have *yourself*. This is not covetous. We are commanded not to covet the things our *neighbor* has.

The spirit of poverty, I’m convinced, can be not only on an individual, but also on a whole denomination, a country or even a continent. Such a denomination will be characterized by everyone trying to get out of the pot what they can, jockeying for lucrative positions and looking most of the time to an outside source to fund ministries. A good friend in a certain denomination told me that he had never heard of a pastor in his denomination ever being given even a shirt by one of the members, let alone a bicycle or motorcycle. On the contrary, members would come to the pastors asking for money.

He related to me how a member had come by his house asking for a kilogram of rice. He had bought a chicken in the market to have a meal with his family but had no grain to eat with it! The pastor himself only rarely was able to eat chicken in his home and worked hard on his farm to feed his family. A pastor in the same denomination had been able to earn money to buy himself a motorbike and to roof his home with tin. He was visited in his village by one of their missionaries who told him he should only have a bicycle and a thatch roof since most of the villagers did not have much.

This would not be so noticeable an indication of the spirit of poverty except that another church movement in the same poor country has a

spirit of generosity. Christians want to bless their pastors and buy them cars, furnish their homes voluntarily, and offer them the use of their properties. I myself have benefited from one of those ladies who lets me have the key to her vacant house when I travel to her city!

Yet another symptom of the spirit of poverty is having no joy when others are blessed. The brothers of Joseph in the Bible had this symptom. They were not happy when their brother Joseph was blessed with a coat of many colors that his loving father gave him. They were jealous and hated him because they did not have such a coat. They made plans to kill him they were so displeased. I think it's no accident that these brothers fell on hard times and lost nearly everything before being rescued by Joseph later on.

**How do you feel when you hear that someone has been blessed?** When others succeed and get a nice car or house does it make you feel happy or sad? If someone sees an acquaintance that has something costly and beautiful and is saddened or angry or feels hatred toward them, the odds are they have a spirit of poverty.

I knew a man who was furious when he attended a congregational meeting at his denominational church. A vote was taken and the members, loving their pastor, raised his salary to more than \$30,000 per year, which was a lot in those days. The man was unhappy because he worked very hard at his job but did earn as much as the pastor, who he thought only worked for one hour per week! God had blessed him abundantly in material possessions but he did not want to see the pastor blessed. He refused all advice to tithe, and eventually ended up in bankruptcy and many other more serious problems. I am not saying that all his problems resulted from his feelings towards the pastor, but this resentment of another's blessing was a symptom of what I call the spirit of poverty, which can have very disastrous effects in our lives.

Someone told me that since Jesus commanded His disciples to go and preach without carrying a bag with them, this means that the servant of God should not receive offerings. Is your belief about giving determined by the Bible's teaching, or is it *really* the result of not wanting to

see someone blessed? Jesus told them not to carry their own bag with them because they would be supplied along the way.

Many times I have noticed that a “doctrine” we hold to can be a cover for something in our heart! **“As he loved cursing, so let it come to him; as he did not delight in blessing, so let it be far from him.”** (Psalms 109:17) What happens to those who do not delight in blessing? It will also “be far from him.” This is the spirit of poverty in action and consequence.

**Do you see yourself according to the amount of money you earn?** If so, it could be an indicator that you have the spirit of poverty. Do you feel inferior or lack confidence when around people that have more money than you do? Jesus said that our lives do not consist in the abundance of things we possess. **“Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?”**

Probably the greatest single symptom of the spirit of poverty is the lack of generosity. This person gives neither to the poor nor to the work of the Lord. This person has decided to believe that tithing is either legalism, or a doctrine propagated by preachers to get rich. He fears that in giving, he himself would then not have enough for his own needs. He fears poverty because he does not believe that God will supply his needs. It is my belief that the spirit of poverty is essentially a kind of spirit of fear. This fear controls and keeps people from giving. Let us not forget that the reason God gives wealth is to bless the nations. It should not be surprising if some of the devil’s hardest work is done keeping people from giving. An effective tool for this is the spirit of poverty.

How does it make you feel when you hear someone asking for money? Does anger rise up in you? If you have bitter feelings when you hear appeals, particularly for the Gospel, I warn you that is a very dangerous sign. In my experience of dealing with such cases it is a sign of impending disaster not only in the financial realm but the whole life. To be sure, we must evaluate any appeal and certainly many are not valid. It is even normal to have a certain godly anger at some things. However, I

have known people who curse and go into a rage over the idea of ministries soliciting money and it is not normal.

I will never forget the story told by Jack Hayford in his book, *The Church on the Way*. He explained how the spirit of poverty causes us to think of getting rather than giving, even in the spiritual things! He told how he used to go door to door trying to get people to come and attend his small church. He realized that he was reaching out from *his own* need to get those people to build his church, rather than to bless *them*. He changed his tactics and began concentrating on blessing people rather than getting them to join his church. The results were astounding, and now he has one of the largest and most effective churches in the nation, with thousands of members.

One obvious sign of the spirit of poverty is blaming others for failure. After his sin, Adam blamed his wife for giving him the forbidden fruit to eat. He did not want to acknowledge his own mistake. There are those like Adam who always blame someone. Saul claimed that he disobeyed the word given him by Samuel the prophet because of pressure from the people. He even blamed the prophet being late. Needless to say, Saul eventually lost everything, even his kingdom, family, and life.

Some say they could really serve the Lord except for their wives or husbands. Others blame the spouse for poverty. One man said that his wife did not know how to earn money in the markets like other women did. Another could have done well, he said, except for the spending habits of his wife and her management of the household finances.

There are others, especially in Africa, who blame parents who did not put them through school as far as another brother or friends. Therefore they are convinced someone else is to blame and that they will never succeed. This is of course the lie of the devil. Some blame the boss who won't give a raise, instead of thanking them for giving them a job. Still others blame it on the politicians who have mismanaged the economy so that it is useless to try. It is necessary to admit your own responsibility before you can make progress and escape the grip of the spirit of poverty.

Blaming the rich in general and resenting them is a very dangerous symptom of the spirit of poverty. Class warfare is typical of this. The rich can be a source of blessing to us, of jobs, charity, and showing us how we can also prosper. Resentment against them cuts us off from the flow of blessings.

A very common symptom of the spirit of poverty is the tendency to make excuses for failure. **“The lazy man says, ‘There is a lion outside! I shall be slain in the streets.’”** (Proverbs 22:13) The lazy man cannot go and do business because of some imagined problem in the way that prevents him, when it really is only an irrational fear. He is able to find abundant reasons why he cannot go out and succeed, but he cannot find reasons why he should be blessed.

He also finds excuses in the seasons. **“The lazy man will not plow because of winter; he will beg during harvest and have nothing.”** (Proverbs 20:4) The results of these excuses are serious. He thinks it is too cold and claims he cannot work.

One of the tragedies of the spirit of poverty is that you really cannot help someone who has it without first ridding them of it. I have tried to help many people financially, even buying them materials to start small businesses, yet they squandered it because of that spirit. Money can never solve a spiritual problem, though it can ease the suffering for a moment or delay the inevitable failure.

I tried to help a certain friend who perpetually had no money and talked about his lack and how much others were blessed. He forever was trying to get his old motor bike fixed or get bus fare. Since he said he was prepared to do any kind of work no matter how menial to get money, and since I could not hire him, I located a man who agreed to teach him how to make pottery, and I agreed to buy the materials to get started, since I knew people who made a good living that way.

I was surprised when I suggested it to my friend that he was not happy. “You have to have the customers and markets lined up to do that busi-

ness, you know,” said he. Then I agreed to help him get started making soap at home. There are those in our town who have bought cars (very rare in our part of Africa) with earnings from soap. However, when I told him I had the materials and also someone to teach him how to make the soap, he said, “That will never work. There are a lot of people doing that now.”

I am happy to report to the glory of God that this friend was later touched by His power and repented of a host of impediments and now the blessings are flowing into and through his life in a wonderful way that has totally amazed me. His ministry is also flowing as not before. **God’s ways are infinitely better than ours. His instruments are sharp and precise** and go to the root of the real problem, unlike our crude, blundering attempts to solve complex problems in our own wisdom. The person with the spirit of poverty does not work hard for the boss unless he is being watched. Paul instructs us that we are not to be that way. **“Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God.”** (Colossians 3:22) Whether it is because of laziness, or resentment of the boss, or a feeling that the low wage is only worthy of minimal effort, the result is the same. It is not unto the Lord nor is it sincere.

I had a worker in the former Zaire who I had found begging on the streets and offered a job. He had one bad arm and could not walk very well either, so he came to work for us, cutting grass with his one arm. He also was responsible for opening the gate for the car to go into the compound.

This worker would generally work only when being watched. Since he was hired mainly to help him and his family that he supported, this was not cause for firing. As I drove up to the house and went over a hill on the way approaching it I could often glimpse over the fence and see him resting behind the house where he thought he was unseen. When he heard the sound of my car at the gate, however, he changed position quickly and could be seen sweating and cutting grass. He then came to open the gate for the car. This worker had a strong poverty mentality

and later stole from us. Although he was taken to another country for medical treatment for his arm, and received many other benefits, he never quite lost that attitude and spoke against us and was not grateful, even several times trying to sue us at court.

**The Bible says to work as though it was for Jesus.** He will watch from heaven and give you what is due. He is able to change the heart of the boss or even to remove the boss and put in another one who will appreciate what you do.

When Elijah was in the wilderness the Lord commanded the ravens to bring him bread and meat in the morning and evening. The raven is not normally a generous bird, but rather a greedy thief. If God can change the raven to a giver He can do the same with the cruelest boss, so don't lose heart.

Those with the spirit of poverty often have the continual thought that they are somehow cursed, and therefore the usual blessings can't be theirs. They think it is just not their lot to succeed. The thought comes that God is against them or doesn't want them to be blessed for some reason they cannot ascertain. They walk in the darkness and do not know why they keep stumbling. It is a mystery to them but they believe it. They tell everyone that they have no luck, therefore it is useless to make an effort or to have hope.

In Africa this belief in being cursed can be quite literal. Many think that someone who doesn't like them has paid (as often actually happens) a sorcerer to have a curse put on them. Some also feel the curse was put on them at birth, and it is not uncommon for a child to be named "pain", or "trouble" depending on the circumstances at the time of its birth. Thanks be to God that He has given us a simple solution to this problem which we will see later on in the book so keep reading! There is without doubt hope.

A very noticeable sign of the spirit of poverty is the habit of borrowing. In every crisis the first thought is not that if one waits God will provide.

The hasty thought is to get out of the problem through borrowing. Debts accumulate. The dependence is on man rather than on God.

**“Thus says the LORD: Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the LORD.”** (Jeremiah 17:5) The problem with looking to man and depending inordinately on man to get you out of problems is that the inevitable result is a lessening of dependence on and faith in God. When the heart searches for the man who will help it departs from the Lord, and bad things begin to happen. The strong language of the scripture is shocking but cannot be denied: “Cursed is the man...”

The good news is that in Jesus Christ we don't have to suffer effects of the curse.

I knew a pastor who felt he was called to work in our town, and yet he was continually having financial problems. Instead of taking responsibility for the problem he tried to lay the burden on the man who had recommended he move there. When asked if he had not himself said that God had called him there, he admitted it was true. Why then did he not think God was responsible to care for him?

As we tried to understand why he continued to have these problems which we didn't think were normal, we asked if he was faithful in tithing and he said that he was. We were still puzzled until he revealed that he had made a habit of borrowing from neighbors any time he needed money. After resolving this issue and deciding that God had called and would provide, he is now doing very well.

Another symptom of the spirit of poverty is the belief that the blessings are always somewhere *else* other than *where you are*. In Africa we have many people fleeing to our crowded cities from the countryside, believing life is better, only to live in squalor in the slums. Many in the city think that those in the country have it good because they would seem to never lack food, being cultivators. Many have the dream of going overseas where life is heard to be easy and luxurious.

It is the opposite for the one who trusts in God as his provider in all circumstances and locations. He knows that God will make him to go into the land of promise rather than his needing to enter into it himself under his own power. **“Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country.”** (Deuteronomy 28:3) In Burkina Faso we have many who go to Ivory Coast looking for the prosperity they seek, yet many fall into crime and immorality and disease. This is not to say that God does not tell some to go and they are blessed there. However, many abandon their families and never prosper.

It is exciting to realize that the Lord is the God of the whole earth and His promises never have a clause saying “not available outside the U.S.” Just the opposite is taught in scripture. Like Abraham, the one who is blessed in Jesus knows that whether he turns to the right or to the left he will be blessed in either direction. Deuteronomy 28:8 says, **“The LORD will command the blessing on you..”** The blessing is never in a geographical or circumstantial location, but rather it is on you! Therefore wherever you go the blessings will follow you and overtake you. **Surely goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life.**

Solomon had many obvious signs of the spirit of poverty and it is no surprise that he squandered what David left him and had ten of the tribes he had inherited torn away from his family after his death. The desire to be rich and always wanting more and more are spoken of in 1 Timothy 6:9. **“But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.”**

Those eager to amass a fortune fall into a “snare.” The spirit of poverty wants to snare us any way it can. Solomon also apparently gyped the man who had really helped him to get massive amounts of gold and other precious materials, Hiram, king of Tyre (1 Kings 9:11-13). He gave him twenty cities that were not good ones and disappointed him.

The book of proverbs tells us that shortchanging people and keeping them from getting what they deserve is a cause of poverty. It says that,

**“there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty.”** A worker who withholds the full effort that is due, or the boss who withholds the promotion that is due, each will be in danger of being led into poverty. The same goes for paying taxes or caring for your wife and giving her what she is due in the way of provision.

Going into partnership with wicked men is also an indication of something that leads to poverty. Even the great and just king Jehosaphat was not immune from this and suffered a very great loss as a result. He went in with Ahaziah on a gold deal but the ships he built for this wrecked and never completed the expedition to Ophir. Be sure you go into business with righteous men. This space is not enough to tell all the cases of men who thought they could get rich on a deal and were so intent on it they willfully ignored the lack of integrity of the partner. They inevitably regret it later.

In a book by George Otis, Jr. called *The Twilight Labyrinth* the question is asked, “Why does darkness linger where it does?” When I read that book I wondered, “Why does poverty linger where it does?” Why does it linger in Africa more than anywhere else, though its people seem to work as hard as any other? The manifestations of the spirit of poverty are all over the continent. Africa relies on foreign debt, has many leaders that try to exploit their own people in order to get rich, fights wars over diamond and gold mines, confesses to the donors that it is poor, compares itself with what other continents have more, and blames former colonial powers for its poverty and other problems.

## Summary

It is important to know the symptoms of the spirit of poverty so that we can recognize them in ourselves and take action. They include: saying we are poor; thinking and talking about what we don't have rather than what God has given us; blaming our failures on others instead of taking responsibility; making excuses for why we cannot prosper; lack of generosity; coveting others' possessions; hating to see others blessed; sense of being under a curse; desiring to hoard up more and more wealth; a pattern of borrowing as a lifestyle; trusing in sources other than God;

thinking the grass is greener elsewhere; stealing; lack of gratitude; working hard only when under supervision; continual financial problems that are not normal. Not every poor person has the spirit of poverty. Some are going through times of testing, while others are suffering for the cause of Christ.

## REMOVING THE BLOCKAGES

Our spirit is like a pipe. If the pipe is stopped up, the water does not pass normally. This pipe goes all the way to heaven. On the other end of the pipe there is abundance. God has already reserved for us everything that we need and more. His reservoir is full of water but it comes out our end sparingly and irregularly because our pipe is blocked.

One big thing that blocks the heart is sin. **“Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.”** (Isaiah 59:1-2)

This scripture makes it clear that the problem is not on God’s side. He does not lack the resources to help us. He lacks neither the ability nor the will to do so. However, when we persist in sin we separate ourselves from Him, causing Him to hide His face and blessings. When we repent, we find in all cases that God is more than delighted to provide for us and show His goodness in every way.

Over the past year since we began teaching this course in Africa we have seen even the poorest countries become places of blessing and abundance for those who trust in Christ. **It is amazing what gushes out when you unstop a pipe!** One church in Niger, the poorest country in the world, saw such an outpouring after the course that offerings multiplied by ten fold! Two million francs of debt were paid off, churches built, land acquired, businesses started, and the poor in the community fed by the overflow of generosity and blessing.

The problem is on our side, not God's. He always wants to bless because He is good. Even men who are wicked try to bless their own children (Matthew 7:11). How much more God? I do not mean to imply that all suffering and poverty is due to sin. However, if abnormal and unexplainable crises keep coming and seem to attach themselves to you, may I suggest that there may be a blockage preventing the normal flow of God's goodness coming into your life?

The Bible says that God has given His people Israel a **“land flowing with milk and honey.”** We are also children of God and He has given us a land flowing with milk and honey. But like the Israelites, it is possible to live in the midst of the Promised Land without receiving the blessings due to our blockages.

The biggest blockage is being under a curse. To all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as the substitute for the punishment for our sins there should be no curse. The Bible tells us clearly in Galatians 3:13-14, **“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”**

Poverty is a curse that Christ has redeemed us from. Not only did He die to take away the curse of the law, but also so that the blessing of Abraham would be upon us so that we could receive the Spirit. There only remains blessing for us in Christ Jesus. Because of His offering for us we have as our inheritance all the promises that God has given in His Word.

If we lack confidence that we are redeemed from the curse then we will be subject to many of the things the devil wants to throw at us. We can even experience many of the effects of the curse that should only be the portion of the unsaved. The devil can pull the wool over a person's eyes and make him accept just about anything if the person does not realize his rights and position in Christ. It is by faith that we appropriate the promises and blessings and grace of God. If we do not believe we are redeemed from the curse then that is a continual blockage for us.

In one of our seminars in a church in Ouagadougou a young man came in from off the street. He had been stranded in Ouagadougou for nearly a year because he lacked the money for a bus ticket to return to his native Ivory Coast. The night of our seminar he had gone outside to smoke a cigarette when he heard our meeting going on. At the end of the meeting he responded to the invitation for salvation and received prayer. The next morning a relative offered to pay his way back home and by that afternoon he was on his way. I don't believe it was a coincidence that he gave his life to Jesus and the way was opened for his return.

One of the blockages is the tendency to borrow money and to depend on men instead of believing God and depending on Him (Jeremiah 17:5). God is jealous. He wants us to look to Him and not to go to men doubting He provides. Of course, anyone can borrow from time to time. However, if borrowing is a habit one resorts to, then it could be a blockage.

A certain pastor came to me from time to time asking for help. One day his wife was sick and I gave him some money for medicine. Another day he came and reported his family had not had a meal in three days and he had visitors from the village who were staying with him. I was able to help him out with a sack of grain. At other times also he came by for help. One day he came and needed money because his wife was very seriously ill and needed to pay the hospital.

Finally he came by for help and I told him we needed to sit down and talk. I told him that this was not normal and that we needed to find out what was the problem. I reminded him of the story of the disciples of Elisha who lost an axe head that fell into the lake. Since it was borrowed, this was a problem. The first step Elisha took to solve the problem, once he had been called to the scene, was to ask the question, **“Where did it fall?”** (2 Kings 6:6) We also let things fall and lose something from time to time.

When I asked the pastor where he might have dropped it he nodded in agreement. “You’re right. This is not normal to live like this. I dropped it somewhere.” He told me that he had stopped preaching the Gospel and had gone to work for a secular company that had not been paying his salary, always promising to make it up to him the next month. He became dependent on the boss who deceived him time after time.

He repented and joined a large church where he preached several times a week and was given the oversight responsibility after a short time while the senior pastor was out of the country. His ministry was blessed, the gifts of the Spirit flowed and many lives were touched. He also took another job where he was very well paid. He has never returned for help.

For about a year in Burkina Faso I was working with a refugee from Congo who could never seem to get a break. The rest of his large family was being held in Burundi by the authorities there. I helped him write to various aid organizations and even visited officials with him to explain his situation, but nothing helped. In fact there were not even any sympathetic responses to my inquiries. It was very frustrating.

I met him one time recently and it seemed we were going back over the same ground all over again but I told him I would keep trying. As I got in my car to leave, however, I had the impression that this was just not normal, that there must be a blockage somewhere. I mentioned it to the man and he nodded that it was so. I will not go into details of the issues he had in his life, but later that night he telephoned me and said he had been thinking and there was some disobedience that could be the problem. He turned from it and we both turned to the Lord to ask for His mercy and to clear away the obstacles.

In the book of Haggai we are told that there was a blockage in the Jewish people that caused them to put their money in a “**sack full of holes.**” They were planting a lot but reaping little. They didn’t get enough to eat and their blankets were not long enough to keep them warm. The reason was that they were building their own homes and not

building God's house. God had caused the sky to withhold its dew and a drought to come on the land.

When they repented then God opened the floodgates. The people went up to build God's temple and the promise given was clearly dated from the time they had removed to blockage to His blessing. **“Consider now from this day forward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, from the day that the foundation of the LORD's temple was laid-- ...But from this day, I will bless you.”** (Haggai 2:18-19) Even you, dear reader, from the day you change your mind and priorities and take action and remove the blockages, then *from that day* the Lord will bless you!

Before the week was out his entire family had been released by the Burundi government and was issued seven free air tickets to come and join him. Not only that but people began to answer my appeals and work on how to help him with other needs. At our first prayer meeting with the newly arrived family, several of them gave their lives to the Lord Jesus. I have seen similar things too many times to doubt that it is a coincidence. **God is ready, willing and waiting to move if we remove the separation.**

Some time back I was approached by someone who had stolen \$120 from me decades ago. I didn't even remember it, but the individual had been suffering the guilt ever since. This person's life had been filled with heartache and failure, inability to hold down jobs and broken homes. They were touched by a radio preacher who said the problems people have sometimes come from things they have done. They scraped together the money from a work bonus and gave me the whole \$120.

I tried to refuse it, but they insisted and we then prayed together for God to pour out His blessings. After only a month I was thrilled to receive news of a supernatural intervention. My friend was helped to purchase a home for the first time, got steady work, and is still experiencing one blessing after another ever since, both spiritually, emotionally, socially and materially. **When it rains it pours!**

A certain man in Ouagadougou had been passed over many times for promotion on his job. He also was passed over for a trip to Europe to get higher education, although this opportunity was usually granted for seniority. Although he was a Christian and a deacon in his church, over time he became very bitter and began to hate his boss and others who had disregarded him. One night he was watching our television broadcast in Burkina Faso and heard me talking about those who blame others for their failures. He forgave everyone and was liberated.

He was filled with love and joy. Not only that but he was healed of a disease in his leg that he had had for 40 years. We rejoiced together when he visited me at home to tell me his testimony. He was full of plans for evangelism and strategies to grow the cell group that met in his home, in which he had begun to lose interest before. He wanted to go back even to his home village to ask forgiveness of everyone he had resented. It often happens that removing a blockage to financial blessing will release ministry flow and opportunities.

I have a dear friend, Ariste, who is a pastor in Burkina Faso. He is the son of parents who were both of mixed French and African birth. Ever since he was small, Ariste hated the French, who were the colonial power in the region. Without even knowing why, even when he heard of the French soccer or other team winning he felt bad.

Ariste's father had also hated France, probably because his French father had abandoned him while still young. Ariste gave his life to Jesus a few years ago and was completely transformed, except that he still had this hatred of France. Unable to live with it because he knew that it was incompatible with his relationship with Christ, Ariste finally surrendered all one night in desperation. The Lord completely took away all those feelings and his heart was filled with only love for the French.

Days later, Ariste's teenage daughter was curious to look at her grandfather's old papers which had been packed away since his death. When she examined them she found that the grandfather had had a French birth certificate. Because of this his children, though born in the African

colony, had the right to French citizenship, and the grandchildren as well!

The family went to the French embassy to get papers on all of them. Already all of Ariste's children have gone to Europe for studies, are free to travel or live anywhere in Europe, and have gotten countless other advantages. Only people born in a poor African country with its seemingly limited opportunities, lack of education, and hopelessness can imagine what it means to suddenly receive French citizenship. That is the dream of millions who try everything to get to Europe, and yet Ariste received this freely after his repentance.

Though he chose to remain and pastor in Burkina Faso and merely visit France, the blessings still flow because of removing that blockage. Sadly, Ariste discovered that his father had refused to be considered French, even though his government pension in the colony would have been far greater as a Frenchman under the old colonial system of the time than as an African. He was apparently willing to forfeit those benefits in order to hold onto his grudge.

Ariste is presently helping me write a booklet on reconciliation between colonies and their former masters that I believe will release new hope and blessing into many African countries where hatred has impeded progress. There is a pattern of poverty among those former colonies that begrudge the colonizers.

I taught this course to Bible school students in Koubri, outside Ouagadougou. One of the students was very bright, seemed to be the most talented in the class, and yet appeared so sad all the time. After the course he recognized that he had been blaming his father, a pastor, for not keeping his promise to support him through school. As a result he had to fend for himself, beg, borrow and scrape his way, often going hungry.

The father also had no interest in inviting the son to minister with him and get experience. This student repented of this blaming and went to the city to meet with his father and apologize and reconcile. Not only

did his father find a donor so that the son will be fully supported for his last year at Bible school, but he asked the son to help him plant a new church! So often we find that ministry and freedom from financial blockages go together.

I believe that when Jesus offered the rich young ruler the chance to give away all his possessions and follow Him, He was not only offering him freedom from his bondage, He was actually offering an apostleship as well. Jesus told some not to follow Him but only extended that invitation to the apostles by saying, **“Follow me.”**

Barnabus received his apostolic calling after he had sold his land and laid it at the feet of the apostles. Because where our treasure is, there our heart is also, the release of the blockage also tends to release a new love for people and the Lord, and boldness to minister often results. **Having faith for finances seems to be a prerequisite for having a ministry.** Jesus said that if we were faithful with that which is least, then we would be entrusted with the true riches. What greater riches are there than souls coming to Christ?

Another student in the same class at Koubri realized his blockage was stinginess. He went home and asked his wife how much money they had in the house and took it, which was less than \$1 (not all that uncommon in our country). He gave that away and also gave his coat to the night watchman at the Bible school who had none.

Within a few days a number of miracles happened which you cannot fully understand how unusual they are unless you have lived in such poor countries. Someone came and repaired the student’s bicycle, putting on a pedal (which it didn’t have), a seat, and other parts, so that he now had transportation. Someone also gave him a new shirt and pants. He was able to get an odd job that paid him above the usual. He had some pigs that he had been planning to sell, and figured to get \$80 for them. When he got to the market, however, he was surprised they brought over \$120!

Then he was unexpectedly contacted by his brother who lived in another country, who sent him the money to put a new roof on the family house in which he lived! Needless to say, when he visited me to tell me his testimony, he was excited and I was overwhelmed by the goodness of God and His willingness to help His children.

In pastors' seminar last year a young man came forward and asked for deliverance from the spirit of poverty. He had never given to anyone, even the poor in his life, a fact which stunned me, his being in ministry especially. His repentance was deep and sincere. He began tithing and other giving, especially to the poor.

He began to get so much business in his part-time trade, repairing cracked windshields, that he was soon tithing as much as he had previously been earning! Months later he drove up to my house on his new motor bike all excited to give me his testimony. I knew when he offered to fix my windshield, an expensive job, for free, that something had changed.

He had also been overcome with pity for his former pastor, now retired and living in squalor as a childless widower, and began supporting him. In fact, his faith rose up and he began gathering money to start a ministry of aid to retired pastors in the area, none of whom have pensions.

A year later his brother gave him a car. Since he didn't have a driving license he placed it at a hotel where tourists could rent it. He has received enough rental money that he is thinking of buying another car. His current dream is to build a village for retired pastors in Burkina Faso.

Not only this, but his primary ministry, child evangelism, was booming. He told me how timidity had prevented him from preaching in the children's crusades he had been of helping with. Now he had evident new boldness and was opening new children's cells for the church, seeing many kids accept Jesus.

At one time I personally lived off of debt. I did not realize that this is unfair to God who wants to be our source. We had debts to banks, personal debts to individuals, credit cards, finance company, etc. One Wednesday night an elder in the church was teaching on Christian finances and how we should not live by borrowing.

God spoke to me clearly that I was not to borrow again. The problem was, our sorely needed annual vacation was coming up and we had planned to drive up to New York and visit my brother and do some sightseeing. I had of course planned to put everything on credit, even the gas on our EXXON card.

I could not bear to tell my wife that we could not go on this trip. She worked hard at the bank and needed the getaway. I lay down on the carpet and prayed. I neither wanted to disobey God nor to discourage my wife, but I knew that I had to take a stand if I wanted to make any progress with God and pursue my calling. This was a hurdle I had to go over.

As I lay on my face showing God my checkbook, the phone rang. I had told no one my situation but I got the news I was to receive a gift of about \$2,500. I paid off one personal debt, one credit card also, and had \$200 left that we took to New York for vacation! Within four years all debts were paid off. **Once that decision to trust God was taken, the blockage was removed and I have never gotten into debt since.** I don't believe the ministry we have today would have happened if we had not learned that lesson.

## Summary

God is good to all, the Bible says (Psalms 145:9). He has wonderful things for us and He was to use us as a channel. If our cup is not running over there may be a blockage in our life stopping the normal flow. We must admit it is our fault and repent of habits that the Holy Spirit shows us are blockages. When we do this, we have seen over and over again that there is a sudden "spurt" of blessings that God pours out.

Because the heart is linked so strongly to our finances, getting right with God concerning our attitudes toward money inevitably results in a new heart for the things of God in other areas. This results in a new love for souls as well as greater boldness, power and joy.

## THE LAW OF SOWING AND REAPING

In order to overcome the spirit of poverty it is very important that you know the law of sowing and reaping. **“And He said to them, ‘Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?’”** (Mark 4:13) When Jesus spoke of this in the parable of the sower, He seemed to indicate to His disciples that it was the most important of all. He wondered at how they would be able to understand the other parables without understanding this one.

Clearly the principle taught in the parable of the sower must be foundational. This law applies to every domain, whether spiritual, financial or natural. The sower sows the Word. Even the new birth comes from the sowing of the seed of the Gospel in our hearts.

This was the first law that God put into place when He created the earth. **“Then God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth,’ and it was so.”** (Genesis 1:11) This law says that there is seed in everything and that it will produce according to the kind of seed.

What a marvelous law given by a generous, gracious and loving God! This is the foundation of all growth and multiplication in the earth. Everything you see was somehow planted and multiplied. **A simple grain can be planted and yield hundreds of kernels. What a bargain!**

It’s a miracle that God turns one grain into hundreds because of the simple act of putting it into the ground. Even more miraculous is the fact that then those hundreds of grains God gives can each be planted and multiplied also. No wonder the earth is filled with growth.

Paul says in Galatians 6:7, **“Be not deceived. God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap.”** Only a deceived person believes that he will sow without reaping, or that he will escape reaping what he has already sown. It is dangerous to ignore this law. **The quality of the harvest depends on the quality of the seed.** They are of the same kind.

I heard a story about a man who supposedly planted corn in a field and later wished that he had planted beans instead. He was a man of faith and prayed over the farm, “In Jesus’ name produce beans!” Of course when the harvest time came, it was corn that had been produced, not beans. Truly, if you want to harvest beans you must plant beans. You cannot mock God.

There are those who sow love and reap love. Others are friendly and have many friends, however they have not seen the financial provision for their needs, due to not having sown financially. One of the biggest keys to defeating the spirit of poverty is to give.

It is not that we earn God’s blessings but that by doing so we clear the way for Him to bless us in the way He so wants to. If you sow into God’s field He will make it grow in ways beyond our understanding.

The promises of God for those who sow of their goods abound in the Bible. **“But this I say: He who sows sparingly will reap also sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will reap also bountifully.”** (2 Corinthians 9:6) Not only is the *quality* of the harvest dependent of the *quality* of the seed, but here we clearly see that the *quantity* of the harvest accords with the *quantity* of the seed sown.

God is so good! Not only has He given us this marvelous law of abundance so that we can sow and reap, He has also shown His great generosity by *providing us with the seed for sowing!* This is like an investment house that also gives you the money to invest. **“Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberal-**

**ity, which causes thanksgiving through us to God.”** (2 Corinthians 9:10-11)

God, then, **“supplies seed to the sower.”** Then, once it’s sown, He gives the increase, not only for food, but also for sowing again. Notice in the above passage of scripture that Paul did not pray for God to multiply all our seed, but only to multiply **“the seed you have sown.”** The rest lies dormant and unproductive. Also we notice in this passage the purpose for which God enriches people. He teaches that you are **“enriched in everything for all liberality.”** That is, the reason you have been enriched is for more giving! Many of us miss the purpose for which God is giving us everything. It is not only to bless us but also to make us a blessing to all the families of the earth.

If God gives the increase and also gives the seed to sow, that is a deal too good to pass up! Only we can mess it up by eating all the seed He supplies, rather than sowing generously. The same hand that is open to give is also open to receive. **The idea is to be a *channel* of blessing, not a *reservoir*.** If you want to get the flow going, release one end of the pipe in giving and it will begin to gush forth.

I don’t believe there is a formula for mechanically giving  $x$  amount and thinking God is obliged to provide us with  $x$  amount. He looks on the heart. God is not obligated to do anything. He doesn’t need our money for Himself. It just opens the door so He can bless us and through us. It is the step of faith and obedience that He wants to see.

While we don’t have a formula, we *do* have principles. We know that whatever we sow will produce more than we planted. I have never seen or heard of any kind of grain that, when planted, produced one grain. There is not even an animal I know of that is not capable of reproducing more than one offspring! Neither have I ever heard of an investor who was expecting to get back the same amount as his initial investment. If so, he might as well hide it under the mattress!

The Bible gives us the example of Isaac. **“Then Isaac sowed in the land, and reaped the same year a hundredfold; and the LORD**

**blessed him.”** (Genesis 26:12) Isaac was not asking to be blessed without taking responsibility and obeying God by sowing. He did not sit down and expect the blessing to come without any action. The one who reaps without sowing is a thief.

Now someone may say that Isaac was blessed that way because it was his destiny to grow into the great people of Israel so that he needed more than the usual finances in order to found the nation. I agree completely, but *we also have an equally great destiny* to win the whole world to Christ and to show His love by charity!

While we don't have a formula, we know that the harvest is abundant, that is, more than enough. Over and over again in scripture we see the hundredfold. Isaac harvested a hundredfold but every case is different, even when we look at the results of sowing the Word into hearts. **“But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundred, some sixty, some thirty.”** (Matthew 13:8) Seed that fell on bad places didn't yield anything at all. Instead of trying to calculate how much we get from sowing, let's just trust God to keep track and feel free to give liberally without worrying that we will be abandoned.

Notice that some seed fell on “good ground.” In the same way that some hearts are good ground for the Gospel, there are places to give that seem to produce better harvest than others. The work of God is good ground. The true poor are also very good ground. Proverbs 19:17 says: **“He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, and He will pay back what he has given.”** What a privilege to lend to the Lord! I think we can trust Him to guard what we have lent Him! In the hour of need we can go to Him for it.

After having given our tithes at the house of God, we are free to scatter offerings wherever we choose, being led by the Holy Spirit. A pastor's wife was touched at one of our seminars and decided to spend 2,500 francs to buy medicine for two sick people she knew couldn't afford it. Her husband came to my house some days later to report what happened after that. A lady drove up to the church on a motorcycle and left an envelope for the pastor's wife. When she opened it she found 22,500

francs! I don't believe we need to be looking always for something spectacular to happen when we sow, but I believe God does things to encourage us that we are going in the right direction. Miracles should be happening daily in our lives.

The work of the Lord is definitely good ground. At one of our seminars in Burkina Faso, God spoke to a pastor to sow a large offering to buy a truckload of sand for the construction of a new building for a church that was showing signs of revival. This pastor, who was also the director of a Bible school, had prayed for years for the money to build a dormitory for the students. He had asked donations from many different visiting teachers with no response.

Nearly six weeks after "sowing" that truckload of sand, someone gave the pastor the money to build the dormitory. The pastor had also for a long time sought the money to evangelize a certain unreached people group in our country. A month later he received the money necessary to take a team of 120 persons for two weeks to evangelize 20 villages! Other offerings were released for additional outreaches. He had also been in poor health for several years, but regained his strength and is now doing well.

Prayer alone is not a cure-all. As we saw, prayer cannot turn corn seeds into beans! That pastor had prayed without results. God cannot honor our prayer when we have in our hand the keys. God is not mocked. Prayer cannot cover over disobedience. He has given you seed. Sow together with prayer and you will see victories that prayer alone can never gain.

In 1986 my wife and I wanted to go to Africa as missionaries, but we did not have enough money to support ourselves there. What we would need was huge. Several months before leaving we began to sow some seeds. First I prayed to God and the Spirit showed me some worthy ministries to give to, that were good ground in the Lord's field.

In my heart I knew the amount of money that would produce the large harvest we would need to be able to buy air tickets, a vehicle on arrival

in Africa, get set up, and continue monthly. After sowing that amount, I waited for the results. Several months later, all the money we needed came in, and we flew to Kenya with joy.

Only the Spirit can tell us how much we need to sow in the way of offerings over and above our tithes. As we said, there is no mechanical formula. However, a farmer with experience knows how many sacks of seed he must sow to reap the number of sacks he needs. He plans his planting according to the quantity required. First give your tithes to the local church, and then ask the Lord to lead you in how much you should sow and into what ground.

A farmer must be patient. No farmer plants in his field today and comes back tomorrow expecting to harvest. Sometimes God encourages us with immediate results, especially when beginning the faith walk, but generally we must wait and continue to be faithful.

Ecclesiastes 11:1 says, **“Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days.”** If we are regularly throwing bread on the waters, then we should eventually be fairly regular in finding it! However, notice that the scripture says, **“after many days.”** What does that mean? Do we wait a month, six months, ten years? The answer is that God knows, and that it will be at the best time. He knows when we will need it. He puts it in the storehouse. In the next chapter we will see how to open the storehouse in times of need.

On the calendar of God there are seasons. As we have already seen, even those who do not have a spirit of poverty will experience difficult seasons of trial and crisis. The psalmist speaks of the righteous man in this way, **“He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also does not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.”** (Psalms 1:3) Yes, whatever he does prospers, but when? Not immediately always, but “in its *season*.”

There are so many people who give their tithes and offerings for a while, then become discouraged and stop. Continue to honor the Lord with your possessions in *all seasons*. Don't let the spirit of poverty de-

ceive you. Whatever you sow you will surely reap, even if it is **“after many days”**. The same is true in spiritual things. The Bible tells us to not grow weary in doing good, for in **“due season”** we will reap if we don’t stop (Galatians 6:9).

I must here insert a word of warning. If you have put your hand to the plow, do not look back. This applies to many things in the kingdom of God. I regret that there are some people I know who once defeated the spirit of poverty, yet now are more bound than ever before. They began to obey for a period but then grew weary and began to *eat their seed* and also to rob God of even the tithes. Their condition now is worse than even before.

**“There is one who scatters, yet increases more; and there is one who withholds more than what is right, but it leads to poverty.”** (Proverbs 11:24) We had a student in the Bible school in Zaire who was very faithful and knew his Bible better than almost anyone. Emani loved the Word, and his conduct was excellent. His only problem that I could see was poverty. Oftentimes he was not able to pay his fees, and more than once we took up an offering among the students to pay his way, though the fee was nominal. The church he pastored was renting a tiny place that they had difficulty paying for. His household also lacked food and medicine.

I was away from the country for a few months and came back to find Emani transformed. I was stunned to see him dressing smartly, with a spring in his step and a radiant countenance. He told me how he had just planted a church in Shabunda and done many other things. Now you must understand that Shabunda is deep in the rain forest and about the only way to get there is by plane. I asked him how he had been able to afford airfare (he didn’t even own a bicycle).

“I discovered the secret,” he said. “It’s giving!” During my absence from Zaire I had asked a Rwandan friend to teach the Word. He had taught the students to give is better than to receive and to concentrate on blessing others and believing the promises of God for your provision. The teaching astounded all the students and the atmosphere of the

school was changed. Emani, having long since graduated with honors, is now running that Bible school in what is now Congo, and helped keep it going through wars and rebellions in that region.

## Summary

One of the most fundamental laws that God laid down at creation and reiterated throughout the Bible is the principle of sowing and reaping. God gives the increase, but He has placed the seed in our hands to plant, and has commanded the earth to produce according to the seeds sown. This principle applies to every domain, natural and spiritual, spreading the Word as well as in giving.

In all cases we can expect multiplication to result if we sow into good ground. God wants us to sow into spreading the Gospel and helping the poor, thereby fulfilling our covenant to bless all the families of the earth through Jesus Christ. We must be patient and continue to practice giving steadily, because reaping comes in the season that God has planned and the quantity He determines.

## HOW TO OPEN THE WINDOWS OF HEAVEN

There is a great reservoir for us in heaven. This is sometimes referred to as the storehouse of God. You can't see it but it is there in the spiritual realms. He prepared what we will need in the time of crisis and for His work. This storehouse is full of abundance and is bursting with treasure. Every day the amount increases.

In this chapter we will learn how to open this treasury both for abundance in our personal lives and to support the work of God. Joseph was a young man who understood the secret of this storehouse. God showed him the interpretation of Pharaoh's dream. It was the key to the treasury of all the riches of Egypt and of their neighboring countries.

During the days of plenty Joseph put the surplus into the storehouse. During the years of famine the people came from everywhere to buy the

food. They brought their money to buy the food at a high price because this was better than to die of hunger.

After their departure from Egypt, God said to the children of Israel to borrow gold and silver from their neighbors. The next day they went out with their wealth. **“He also brought them out with silver and gold, and there was not one feeble among them.”** (Psalms 105:37) A nation of slaves became rich in one day!

So then, Joseph put the money in the storehouse and his dream opened it at the right time, many generations later. Joseph did not have a purely personal dream. He spoke of the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt, which would come later, and even gave instructions concerning his bones.

The Hebrews had a dream that came from God. It was to go to the land of promise. In order to accomplish this mission it was necessary to open the windows of heaven. It was impossible to go to Canaan and to construct the tabernacle, offer sacrifices and equip an army without money. God provided for all their needs.

If you have a dream concerning the work of God and for His glory, I assure you that the provision is already in the storehouse. It is not necessary to look for it. You just need to open the door of the storehouse. God will show you the keys. One of the great keys that open the windows of heaven is to have a dream to pursue for the glory of God. However, it must be the right time to open the doors and have access. The good news is that the right time is also the best time and the time of need.

The Bible says, **“A good man leaves an inheritance to his children’s children, but the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous.”** (Proverbs 13:22) Here we see one of many indications in scripture of things being stored, though an earthly location is not mentioned. It is not important if it is presently in the hands of someone here on earth. What is important is that in God’s account book that wealth has been set aside and “stored up.”

How much is stored in that account? The answer is: How much wealth do the sinners have, beginning with the first man up till now? So you can see that even if this were the only verse which speaks of things being stored up, it would be a vast sum. For who is it stored? According to this verse, **“the righteous.”** That is, you must be declared righteous by faith in Jesus Christ in order to access this account.

It is not that we need to ask God to reserve the resources. They are already reserved! He did not say that they *will* be reserved. They *are* reserved. He did not say they were reserved for *whomever*, but only for the righteous. That means you are acting in the name of Jesus when you make a withdrawal. At my bank you can get in my account if your name is Steve Parker. Or, someone can withdraw money using my name and signature. Since Jesus is the Righteous one we must use His name with His *permission*.

I believe that Jesus opened that heavenly reserve many times during His earthly life, to feed the multitudes, to pay His taxes, etc. When He needed a donkey to enter Jerusalem, He sent His disciples to the village where it was waiting, **“Saying, ‘Go into the village opposite you, where as you enter you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Loose him and bring him here.’”** (Luke 19:30) That donkey must have belonged to someone, but in the accounts of God it was at the disposal of the ministry.

How then do you withdraw what is reserved? In this case it was necessary to get a word from the King and then to act on it with boldness. **“And if anyone asks you, ‘Why are you loosing it?’ thus you shall say to him, ‘Because the Lord has need of it.’”** (Luke 19:31) We must act using the Lord’s authority to loose the reserved things. That is to say, if He gives you the order to do it then you may!

When Jesus needed a meeting hall for the Passover meal He did not need to send His disciples going door-to-door looking for a place to rent. Neither did He send them begging. He simply released facilities already there, in the same way that He had them untie the donkey. Peter

and John asked Him where they should prepare the meal and He told them to go to a certain man and inquire about a large, furnished room for the Master's meeting. **“So they went and found it just as He had said to them, and they prepared the Passover.”** (Luke 22:13)

When I was in Kenya many years ago we had just opened a church, but we met in a primary school. It was too far from the neighborhoods for the children to walk to Sunday school. Also, the director often told us to make less noise during our worship services so that we not disturb students in the dormitories on Sunday mornings. We were squeezed. One day in my prayer time I saw the interior of a hotel that was near the center of the town. In the vision it looked perfect for our church meetings.

I went to visit the hotel and looked inside. Sure enough, it was very nice and roomy, just perfect at this stage of growth for the new church. The owner was a tough man. Everyone was afraid of him. In fact, he would sometimes personally go out front of the hotel and use a bullwhip to run off children who got too close to the door. I asked him if we could use the big room for our church meetings and he asked me how much I wanted to pay.

I hesitated because I was unsure what to say, and because he was a fierce-looking man. He had long, stretched ear lobes after the traditional Massai warrior style. After a moment I heard the Lord say, “Tell him he has to give the hall for free.” I again hesitated an instant before telling him. “God wants you to give us the place for nothing.”

He looked at me as though he thought he had not heard me right. “What did you say?” I told him again that he was to freely give us the place for our church. He remained silent for a few seconds before nodding his head reluctantly. “It is true,” he said. “God does want me to give you this freely. Will you pray for me?” I said that of course we would. He turned out to be a most helpful and gracious landlord, putting his employees at our disposal and making sure the hall was mopped and ready to go every Sunday morning and that the chairs were arranged.

God had reserved our place, and it served us very well until the time the church constructed its own building. But to loose the reserved place it was necessary to have a word from God in order to have the authority to say, “The Lord needs it.” If not, I would have been lying. There are many people out there falsely saying that God is telling people to give to them. Instead of being a blessing it is rude to try to tell people they must give something unless you are led by the Spirit to do so.

The good news that we have to share with the world is that God has already provided! **“Your congregation dwelt in it; You, O God, provided in your goodness for the poor.”** (Psalms 68:10) God has already prepared the table. That is not the problem. The problem is that it is still sitting on the table unclaimed. No one seems to want to come to the feast. **“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.”** (Psalms 23:5) Most of us would prefer to use our own cleverness to get what we need rather than go to Him.

I once heard an evangelist telling of how he was transported to heaven when he was a small child. I cannot verify this story, but I believe the principle taught by it is accurate. He said that Jesus was showing him many things there, including a storage room that had many body parts such as ears, eyes and arms. He was told that these things were waiting for someone to believe for them to be sent down to those who needed the creative miracle.

As I said, I don't know if this was a true vision. However, I do believe that many things including body parts are in the account for withdrawal. The Bible tells us that blessings are reserved in heaven for us. It also tells us to pray that God's will be done on *earth*, even as it is done in heaven. In heaven we are whole, but it does not appear so on earth. It is *here on the earth* that we need eyes and arms and legs to do the job. That money will not be needed in heaven. It is *here* that we need to loose the resources to buy amplifiers to run crusades with.

When Malchus had his ear cut off Jesus healed it by replacing it. Is it possible that Jesus took that ear from the reserve? The man with a withered hand had it restored. Where did that new arm come from?

Apparently Jesus created eyes for a man born blind who probably had no eyeballs in the sockets. Where did they come from and where did the bread come from that He used to feed the thousands?

Someone might argue that it was not necessary for Jesus to take anything from a reserve, since He is God and can create any time He wants. That is true, except for the fact that since the original creation He has normally used what was already here. The Bible tells us that when God made the flood He broke up the stores of waters that were there already in the depths and also in the heavens (Genesis 6:11). The Bible also tells us that God brings the wind out of His treasuries (Psalms 135:7) when He sends it on the earth. He didn't create more wind or more water for the flood. He already had it on account and sometimes He balances His books. God has stored sound wisdom (Proverbs 2:7) which can be accessed by the upright who trust in Him.

In Zaire we had an older student named Baguma in the Bible school. One morning during the prayer time I felt impressed that God wanted to do something special. I asked who had the most impossible situation so that we could pray for an answer for the glory of God. There was some debate as to whose case was more difficult but we settled on Baguma's need for a place to meet for his growing church. They prayed in a tiny place that didn't belong to them and the members were mostly jobless poor.

Baguma said it would take \$25,000 to build something and we believed that was a small amount for God, though it was certainly impossible according to human standards (since the best-paid member probably earned less than \$50 per month). We asked for God to grant the request by His power. That was on a Wednesday morning. On the Friday morning, two days later, Baguma came to school grinning from ear to ear and told us what the Lord had done.

During the ethnic problems in Zaire, the Tutsis were in great danger. A certain wealthy Tutsi wanted to leave town during the night without informing anyone, but he also wanted to sell his large house. So he went to a Christian he could trust, a pastor who happened to be the

overseer of the church Baguma pastored. The Tutsi offered the house to the pastor's ministry if he would give whatever he could as payment. The pastor got together what little he had on hand and bought the house so the Tutsi could flee the country.

The house was then given to Baguma's church! After taking out the walls it became a nice meeting hall (I have had the privilege to preach there). The amazing thing is that this Tutsi needed to flee for some time but made the decision at the same time as we prayed. **The blessing had been there on reserve but not loosed for the need.**

You will remember from an earlier chapter the man who had been jobless for six years. When he was offered two different jobs a week later the hotel manager asked him, "Where have you been? We've been looking a long time for someone like you." **Many times God has things ready but the release has not come.** I believe that He has put it in our hands to loose that donkey.

One other marvelous way to call forth resources from the storehouse of God is to command the thief to pay back. Try to think of everything the devil has stolen from you and your loved ones. He must pay it back. As a missionary in Africa these many years I have seen so many lives and goods robbed from the people. I have wonderful news for you. If Satan is caught he must pay!

Proverbs 6:31 tells about a thief who is caught stealing to feed his family. According to this verse he was required to pay back seven times what he stole, even up to his whole house. That is, if he was unable to pay the 700% penalty, everything he had could be confiscated. **"Yet when he is found, he must restore sevenfold; he may have to give up all the substance of his house."**

The Law of Moses also refers to restitution that must be made for stolen property, In every case what is restored is a multiple. There is never a one-for-one restitution. Always, the offended party gets back more than he lost. It is always this way with God. He makes sure we get back more than what was lost when we are restored. It is multiplied.

One could even say that it is a blessing to be robbed under this system because you gain as a result! However there is one very big condition attached to the promise of sevenfold return. The thief *must* be *caught*, or as this translation says, “when he is found.” If you do not find the thief he does not have to pay to you the restitution. The devil has stolen untold trillions of dollars of resources over the centuries. Let’s get busy making him pay!

How then does one “find” the thief? I will give you an example from my experience. I was a missionary in Burundi for a short period in 1992, in the city of Bujumbura. That city had more thieves than any I had ever seen. One day I was standing next to my car talking to someone when I turned and realized that someone had just stolen two praise tapes off the dashboard. I looked at the large group of people quickly passing by and was not able to recognize anyone who appeared to have stolen the tapes. I could not accuse everyone and I did not know how long it had been.

I was angry and frustrated that I could not catch the thief. Then I remembered that scripture, “when he is found, he must restore sevenfold.” I stood there in the road and “caught” the devil. I said out loud that although I didn’t know where my thief was, that I knew how to find the devil, and that he was to restore sevenfold in the name of Jesus according to the Word of God. I then had peace to go about my errands, leaving that with God to keep accounts.

A few days later I was in Rwanda and opened my post office box to check for mail. Inside the box I found two praise tapes. I was blessed, since I was not accustomed in those days to receiving such music tapes, and I made the mental connection to the theft. However, I realized that it did not equal sevenfold. A few days after that I went to the airport in Bujumbura to pick up a friend who was arriving from England. He had his arms full, and before even properly greeting me he unloaded a number of music tapes on me. No one had ever done that before. All together I had now received the full sevenfold restitution from the theft

and was satisfied! With true justice there should be a feeling on the part of the injured party that justice has been done so they can be satisfied.

The devil is not going to make that restitution without being forced. This is consistent with what Jesus said in Matthew 11:12, **“And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.”** Let’s force the spirit of poverty to give up all it has eaten. As Jesus said, the thief only comes to steal, kill and destroy. We can make him let God’s people go from the land of Egypt with their goods. If we do so and obtain the sevenfold return, I have every reason to believe Africa could be transformed from the poorest continent on earth to among the richest. Our Lord said that man of the last would be first (Mark 10:31). Could this also apply to the nations?

One of the clearest promises that God will open the windows of heaven is found in Malachi 3:10. **“Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,” says the LORD of hosts, ‘If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.’**” The key in this case is giving tithes faithfully.

The **“storehouse”** mentioned above is the equivalent of today’s church. There are many Christians who donate 10% of their income to various causes and believe they are faithfully tithing. This is a mistake. I have met many people who told me of giving their **“tithes”** to poor people, orphans, evangelists, or other worthy causes instead of putting it in their local church. In doing so, they were actually giving an *offering but not a tithe*. The tithe is not something we have discretion about. The authorities God has ordained in the local church distribute this according to the wisdom and priorities God has given them. I believe this is a reason why many do not experience the promised blessings they expect.

Dear reader, it is good to give to the poor, but it cannot be considered part of your tithe. If I give a new shirt or bicycle to my pastor or an evangelist to do the work of God, that is a good thing and a generous

offering, but it is not my tithe. The Bible tells us that the tithe “belongs to the Lord.” I cannot take what *belongs* to God and give it to someone *else* by my own authority!

When I give that tithe to God I have no more say-so over it. If I cannot trust the pastor and elders to do what is right with that money, I have the freedom to find another church where I can trust the leaders. I can give my offering wherever I choose, but not my tithe.

The tithe should be taken out *first* thing when I receive any income and set aside till the next church meeting when I can put it in the offering. I should do this before I pay any of my other expenses. Proverbs 3:9-10 says, **“Honor the LORD with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; So your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.”** God wants us to honor Him with the first of our income. It does not honor the Lord as much if we give priority to other needs first and wait to see if we have enough left over for God. Notice that the vats will “*overflow*.” When God opens the floodgates you can expect an overflow.

Many Christians have good intentions and want to be faithful givers but never seem to have enough left after all the month’s expenses. The way to avoid this is to give the first fruits. You will see that the remainder of your money will go further and God will give you wisdom and self-control in how to spend it. Mostly, though, you will have a good conscience knowing you put God first. If we put Him first in everything then He Himself will add all things we need.

If you are married, make every effort to be in agreement about what is a true tithe and set that aside. Also it is best to be in agreement about offerings you want to scatter as seed here and there. Financial disagreements are often the cause of tension in the couple. It is difficult for the home to be in order if God is not put in His place as King of the house in every area, especially in the finances.

Summary

God is never taken by surprise. He has prepared beforehand for our needs, for the poor and for spreading the Good News of Jesus to all families of the earth, as the Abrahamic covenant stipulates. He has laid up these provisions in what is variously called His treasuries, prepared feast, storehouse, set table, windows of heaven, or reserve. Included in this account, I believe, are the wealth of the righteous and the seven-fold return on what the devil has stolen, along with everything Jesus has purchased by His blood, including forgiveness of sin, freedom from slavery and healing of our diseases.

We access this reserve primarily by bringing our tithes and offerings to the house of God. We also can “loose the donkey” upon His command and authority. God-given dreams also cause the doors of the storehouse to be opened to fulfill it. We must force the devil to make the restitution by catching him with the Word of God. Any time we open God’s reserve we can expect what comes out to be beyond our capacity to contain.