

A Fresh, Biblical Approach to

FULLY FUNDING YOUR MINISTRY

Based on *The God Ask* by
STEVE SHADRACH

5 KEYS TO PERSONAL
SUPPORT RAISING

“I want to serve God and be obedient to His leading in my life, but I don’t want to RAISE SUPPORT.”

IF YOU’VE SAID OR THOUGHT THESE WORDS, YOU’RE NOT ALONE. IN FACT, MOST people living a donor-supported lifestyle will admit that, at one time or another, they’ve probably had feelings much like this. Growing up the son of a businessman, I was taught to work hard to achieve financial security on my own merits. But after coming to Christ, I felt a strong calling to full-time ministry that would require me to raise my personal support. I then faced the question, “Will I be obedient to the call I felt towards ministry, or will I turn my back on it because of what I perceive is an insurmountable obstacle of raising support?”

As you can guess, I said “yes” to the Lord, and “no” to my fears and father’s expectations. After taking stock of my belongings, I realized I only had enough money to support my pregnant wife, three kids, and myself six weeks. I was overwhelmed by the reality. But if you feel strongly enough about anything and are prepared to trust God completely, you *will* find a way to accomplish it. Thus was born an overwhelming urgency to build our support team. But first, I had to overcome my mindset that asking for support was simply disguised begging that resulted only in underfunded Christian workers who, to me, seemed like impoverished nomads. After seeking out what Scripture said, I realized support raising was an honorable thing – a biblical calling to invite and involve others in the expansion of the Kingdom of God.

THE GOD ASK

Many of the doubts and fears I had associated with support raising were relieved when I stopped thinking of it as the “Steve Ask” and started thinking of it as the “God Ask,” a perspective originally shared with me by Tom Stickney, a missionary in Kenya. He helped



me to realize that in support raising, our job is only to be faithful to the Ask. The responsibility of procuring the funds lies with God.

In every Ask, there are three persons present: you, your potential supporter, and God. Instead of thinking of the Ask horizontally – you to supporter – think vertically. Our calling and all resources belong to God. Your job as a support raiser is to ask God for provision and trust that where God guides, He'll provide. After talking to God, invite potential donors to seek His guidance on where to invest. There's no reason to feel rejected if the person does not give, because the process is never about you asking for money. It is about God's sovereign will and allocation of funds to support His ministry plans. The Lord is fully capable of providing what you need, when you need it.

You might be praying about the best way to fund your ministry. Should you be a "tentmaker" and work a job while ministering? Or should you raise personal support? Both are biblical, but if you're going to raise support, you'll probably have some doubts, fears, and questions. Despite the stresses and pressures involved in maintaining

a personal support team, I would not want to live any other way! The bonds I've formed over the years with our supporters are priceless. The stories of God building my faith during difficult times could fill a book. And, most of all, when I report to that ministry assignment fully funded, there's a sense of destiny and authority there. The following are five essential keys to begin building your support team. With a little prayer and education, you'll be prepared to answer your calling, no matter what that process looks like.

KEY 1: UNDERSTAND THE BIBLICAL BASIS OF SUPPORT RAISING

STUDY THE SCRIPTURES AND LEARN EXACTLY WHAT GOD THINKS ABOUT ASKING OTHERS to give to you and your ministry. Some Christian workers choose to just pray and trust God to bring in their funds. But it is just as biblical and requires as much or more faith to personally invite others to invest. Either way, we have to understand that God is the source of our funds – not the donors, nor our plans, or our hard work. In the book, *The God Ask*, I unpack many verses regarding asking for support, but here are five examples and teachings from the Old and New Testaments about the validity of God's ministers being supported by others:

- The example of the Levites (Numbers 18:24)
The Jews gave their tithe to the priests for support.
- The example of Jesus (Luke 8:2-3)
Many people supported Jesus and the disciples.
- The teaching of Jesus (Matthew 10:9-10)
A kingdom worker is worthy of his support.
- The example of Paul (Acts 18:4-5)
He stopped tentmaking to preach full-time on support.
- The teaching of Paul (1 Corinthians 9:1-18)
He had the right to be supported by the churches.

When you have a full understanding of God's provision for Christian workers, it's much easier to rely on Him for support. Remember, we are simply stewards of His resources. As you move forward in raising support, simply ask each potential supporter to seek the Word's guidance in whether they should invest those resources in your ministry.

Once you have a biblical perspective on the topic of asking for and living on the support of others, you need to evaluate one more thing – your own giving! Before you can ask anyone else to give, you have to be committed to sacrificially investing in kingdom work on a regular basis. Let's practice what we preach.

KEY 2: KILL THE GIANTS IN YOUR OWN MIND

REMEMBER THE TWELVE HEBREW SPIES WHO WENT INTO THE PROMISED LAND TO TAKE a look before the whole nation was to enter and claim what God had given them? Only Joshua and Caleb came back ready to invade. The other ten spies were so terrified of the giants they saw in the land that they confessed, "We became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight" (Exodus 13:33). Instead of trusting God and moving out with courage, they let fear paralyze them. How they viewed themselves affected how the giants viewed them.

It's the same way in support raising. The confidence level that we have in our God, our vision, and ourselves can make us or break us. All of us have different giants in our own minds that will keep us from beginning and persevering in the process of assembling our full support team. Some common giants to conquer include:

- You or your family might think support raising is really just begging.
- You might not believe you're a worthy investment.

- You might view support raising as a necessary evil that must be endured.
- You might feel people are rejecting you or your ministry if they say no.

You must kill these giants one at a time as you fill your mind with Scripture. Just as God prepared the land for the Israelites, you need to believe that God has prepared the hearts of your potential donors. Believe what God has said about you and your calling and walk boldly in faith as you ask others to invest in you and your vision. Trust that God will lead you to those He has called to financially support your ministry.

KEY 3: PRAY AND PLAN WELL

AFTER COMMITTING TO THE GOD ASK, THERE ARE SEVERAL STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO start planning the work.

PRAY

Author S.D. Gordon said it well, “Prayer is the real work of the ministry. Service is just gathering in the results of prayer.” We need to bathe ourselves and our donors in prayer before, during, and after our support raising journey. God will go before you. He will also build a love for your donors as you pray for them individually.

CREATE YOUR BUDGET

Include everything you need to thrive in ministry – your personal needs, giving, savings, and ministry expenses. Seek to balance a lifestyle that will allow you to maximize your effectiveness with the group you’re reaching, but also be above reproach with your donors on the stewardship of your finances. If you have school debt, simply include

the required monthly amount owed and keep going. Your donors will admire you for keeping your promise to pay it back. Plan on and commit to raising at least 100% of your budget before you even report to your assignment. Have a “*When I Raise My Support*” attitude, not an “*If I Raise My Support*” attitude.

NAMESTORM

Now that you have turned the whole process over to God, you are ready to begin your planning. Write down every person you have ever known during your lifetime. Pray that God would bring people to mind. Don't play Holy Spirit by saying, “Oh, that person would never give.” You'll be surprised by a few that will give and by a few that don't! Also, think of people who have a heart for student work, missions, or whatever group or area you are targeting. List churches, Sunday school classes, foundations, and corporations you are acquainted with. The bulk of your support, though, will come from the individuals with whom you've met over the years.

MAP OUT A PLAN

Divide up all the names according to the cities they live in. Evaluate your list and rate your prospects as “hot,” “medium,” or “cold” based upon your perception of how likely they are to give. Remember that you should not pre-judge if they will give, but it is okay to prioritize who you will speak to sooner rather than later. Next, pray and seek God as to how much (or a range) He would have you ask each donor to consider giving. Don't use a one size fits all plan; instead, base the amount on what you perceive they are able and willing to give, along with the kind of relationship you have with them. Either way, know that the tendency for most support raisers is to ask for too little rather than too much. Suggesting a range gives your donor options and helps them see there is flexibility in your request. Remember, there is no cash flow problem in heaven. Americans give billions of

dollars to charity each year. I believe God has instilled in every person a desire to give and you are simply helping them to invest in eternal things, and thus build up their treasure in heaven.

PLAN OUT A MAP

Figure out which cities you will travel to and when. Schedule it on your calendar. Send a letter or email in advance briefly explaining your vision and that you will soon be calling. It's important to call each person in advance of the trip in order to verify the appointment. During the call, don't let them say yes or no to giving — your only objective is to get an appointment with them. There are six great opportunities during the day for meetings: 1) breakfast near someone's workplace, 2) mid-morning and 3) mid-afternoon for professionals or stay at home moms who can take a break to meet with you, 4) lunch, 5) dinner, 6) after dinner, which is sometimes good for parents with young kids or people who stay up late.

KEY 4: ASK THEM FACE TO FACE

THIS IS THE KEY. JAMES 4:2 SAYS, "WE HAVE NOT BECAUSE WE ASK NOT." THE WORD *ask* is used in the gospels 113 times. God wants to teach us about asking Him and asking others. I have looked at surveys as to why people give and the number one reason is always because someone asked them. It's not unspiritual or fleshly to ask. It is good, biblical, and faith-building to ask. Let's not hide behind our fears. Let's walk toward them and render them powerless! The worst thing anyone can say is, "No." And if they do, it's between them and God.

If instead you choose to cut corners, take the quick, easy route and just send a financial request letter or email out or make a group presentation, you might have a 10% response rate. If you send a letter/email followed by a phone call asking for support, you might

get 25% of people to say yes. But, if you are willing to sit down eyeball-to-eyeball with others and lay out the incredible ministry vision God has called you to, usually well over 50% of your potential supporters will join you as ministry partners! This approach takes time, money, and courage, but it communicates to the donor that they, and your vision, are so important to you that you are willing to go above and beyond normal fund-raising methods.

Don't be fooled. How you go about securing their commitment will determine the amount, consistency, and longevity of their giving. My research shows that ministries that train their staff to ask for the gift in person raise their full budget in half the time of groups who simply share the need, but don't ask. We have not because we ask not. Sound familiar?

KEY 5: CULTIVATE THE RELATIONSHIP

DON'T THINK OF THIS JOURNEY AS FUND-RAISING, BUT AS *FRIEND-RAISING*. NOT AS support raising, but as *supporter* raising! You can have an incredible ministry in their lives. And you might be their only connection to Jesus Christ or the Great Commission when you are faithful to God's call to ask.

There are several ways to ensure a long and fruitful relationship with your supporters.

- Consider tithing your ministry time to your support team: pray for, write to, call, and minister to your supporters.
- Thank before you bank. When a new person or gift comes in, be prompt in sending them a handwritten thank you note or phone call.
- Regularly send well-written newsletters, both e-mail and, at least a few times a year, in print. Share how the investments of

your supporters are paying off, along with some specific prayer requests. Occasional postcards, phone calls, and visits are great too. While you may share some about your personal life or family, 75% of the focus should be on ministry efforts that cast vision and show God's fruit, as that is what they are investing in. Beware: The main reason people drop off of support teams is due to a lack of communication from their missionary.

Win, keep, and lift. When you win a supporter, they are now on your team. Keep them on the team by caring for and cultivating them. Periodically, ask them to prayerfully consider lifting (increasing) their monthly or annual gift to you. Years ago, Campus Crusade had a campaign asking people to give 1 million dollars to their ministry. Almost 250 people said yes. Research showed, though, that the average first gift of these donors had been a mere \$10! Their devotion to this ministry was because someone took the time to win, keep, and lift them over the years.

People will stick with you for life if you will appreciate them and keep them informed. View them as vital partners in your ministry and you will gain not only lifelong supporters, but friends, too. One day you will turn around and realize how blessed you have been and that you, too, would not want to live any other way. Trust God and begin this exciting adventure today. You will never regret it!

THIS RESOURCE IS BASED OFF OF THE PRINCIPLES FOUND IN *THE GOD ASK*: A fresh, biblical approach to personal support raising. This book and more great resources for personal support raising can be found at SupportRaisingSolutions.org. Support Raising Solutions (SRS) partners with hundreds of Great Commission ministries around the globe to equip their staff in this essential area. SRS is a ministry of the Center for Mission Mobilization (mobilization.org).



DR. STEVE SHADRACH and his family have lived and ministered on support since 1986 – and love it! Steve is the Executive Director of the Center for Mission Mobilization (CMM), which sponsors the Personal Support Raising Boot Camps and Support Raising Solutions resources. He has trained thousands of Christian workers from over 500 organizations around the world how to launch their personal ministries and raise their

support. Steve helped found Student Mobilization, The Traveling Team, and the CMM (formerly The BodyBuilders) ministries. He also served as Director of Mobilization for the U.S. Center for World Mission, overseeing the global ministry *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*. A former pastor and missionary himself, Steve has a Doctorate of Ministry in Church and Para-Church Executive Leadership. He and his wife Carol have five grown children and reside in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

BOOKS

If you are going to raise your support, equip yourself as much as possible. Visit CMMPress.org for some essential reading on personal support raising:

- *The God Ask*, a biblical and practical how-to guide for Christian workers raising personal support
- *ViewPoints*, a compilation of 65 short articles that will help shape your perception and approach to support raising

TRAINING

Support Raising Boot Camp is a two-day training seminar designed to help Christian workers realize their God-given role in support raising. Having served over 500 ministries, Support Raising Boot Camp exists to relieve doubts and fears and answer questions regarding support raising, so that the Christian worker may arrive at his or her ministry assignment fully funded.

Find an upcoming training at SupportRaisingSolutions.org.

FREE RESOURCES

- Stay Fully Funded – Get simple, practical, real-world solutions to help fully fund your ministry delivered right to your inbox every month. Sign up today at SupportRaisingSolutions.org.
- Simply Relevant – Join the conversation with other support raisers and trained coaches. Follow us to be challenged, encouraged, and equipped with insights, wisdom, and practical ideas to cultivate and grow your support team.
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- Online Resources – Visit SupportRaisingSolutions.org to access training videos, support-raising documents and articles, and free support-raising software.

SUPPORT RAISING SOLUTIONS

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