

[Received 19 December 2017]

Dear anthony

Today I felt I should share with you some of my experiences over the last weeks and what happened this morning. These kind of events are a huge encouragement to us in doing this work. If I am honest, we have many encouraging experiences, as well as challenges, but I don't always share them with all of you, although I feel that perhaps I should do this more often.

Our recent convoy to Deir Ez-zor has been an incredibly tough as well as a very expensive distribution for us. This is because it is in a very dangerous and difficult region to reach and requires armed protection to get there, as well as protection for the aid and team once there. We have had to hire accommodation for our team as well as providing a generator for electricity and water as well as food. It is also a long distance to transport aid, and few drivers are willing to go so need to be paid more to take this risk. Our Syrian team needed to be paid a good wage for going to this dangerous area where most Syrians would not go under any circumstances, and we have also paid a wage to local people to help us with the distributions. It is essential in such deprived areas to provide some kind of paid work.

In many of the distributions we have needed the police to be present because it quickly become dangerous and our team have been at risk of being crushed on more than one occasion. Desperate people do not conform to the civilised behaviour we expect in a peaceful environment where people are largely well provided for. Helping people in better situations is easier, but helping those who are distressed and who have been reduced to abject poverty is a very different experience, and these difficulties demonstrate all the more why going the extra mile for them is so important. The reality is that so few other NGO's were going. We have been one of the first to go in to help, and are one of just four helping from outside the area at this early stage since it was freed from ISIS.

We made the decision to go to Deir Ez-Zor based on the needs there, and not what it would cost us. I have always taken the view that if we are doing God's work, He will provide everything we need to complete the work. This was God's promise to me when He asked me to step out in faith at the beginning of this journey nearly 3 ½ years ago and He has never, ever let me down in this. There have been times when I needed tens of thousands of pounds to complete the work that we had started, and His timing in providing this, from unexpected sources, has never ceased to amaze me. Perhaps I shouldn't be amazed as we are talking about the master and creator of the universe, but in my limited human vision I still find it amazing.

Over the last weeks, I have felt increasingly anxious about the costs we needed to cover all our distributions in Syria. I even asked our Director in Syria, Dr A, whether we should hold back from doing our next appeal until the dust settles. He has always remained

adamant that we should continue because this aid is needed so desperately by so many people. At times I have felt nervous about continuing when it hasn't been clear whether we would raise enough money to cover all our costs. Dr A has always promised that he will pay from his own pocket if we were unable to cover the costs. He has a successful medical business in addition to the work he does with us, but this was not something I could accept.

A few weeks ago, I could see that we were nearly £50,000 short of what we needed to cover all of these costs! Especially as I wanted to keep a little in reserve for the next appeal. Last week I asked Dr A to send me a fund request for all the outstanding money, no matter how high it was. When I looked at it, I couldn't help feeling daunted by the amount we still needed to find. When we talked about the deficit, he told me how much money he has in his life savings, and said that this money is God's money and he will use even the last cent to ensure that we get this aid to the people who need it. He said he would even sell his car to make sure that we honour God in this work if that is what it takes. I know his attitude to giving and that he is genuinely willing to give everything he has. But I also know that this is money he has saved in case his family have to flee from Syria and try to start again in another country. I felt tremendously uncomfortable with this. But he was completely adamant that we should go ahead with the next appeal.

Today, I started to write an email to send out to all of our supporters, to remind people of the importance of raising the funds for transport and distribution as well as collecting the aid itself. To be honest, I have never liked pressuring our supporters about money, always believing that God will provide everything that we need, when we need it. But perhaps this last week my faith wavered just a little. In the past, I have felt that God has directed me to ask Him for the money we need to do this work, rather than asking people.

Before I finished writing that email, I thought I should re check our bank balance and do some sums to know the exact situation. When I did, I was surprised! Firstly, we received an anonymous £10,000 donation a few weeks ago. I was aware of that and it would clearly make a big difference. I could see that this week we have also received another £10,000 anonymous donation! Amazing! These kind of donations don't happen very often. Added to that were lots of other amounts of a few thousand here and a few thousand there, and lots of smaller donations of a few hundred, right down to £5 and £10 here and there. When I finished doing my sums, and was also willing to include the £10,000 that I had wanted to keep in reserve, I realised that we have the full amount of money that was written on Dr A's fund request last week. Wow! Thank you Jesus!

I was excited, and I wanted to ring him and tell him that we have it. But first I wanted to know what other costs we still have to cover so we exchanged a few messages. The distributions aren't yet finished, so he anticipated we might need another \$5,000 for those, and we still have another five containers waiting to be distributed in another area. It is hard to say how much it will cost,

because if we choose to distribute them close to where they are now, it won't cost us very much, but if we have to transport the aid to tougher areas, it will cost us more. We agreed that we should base the decision of where to distribute them on serving the neediest places, not the places that are the cheapest and easiest for us to reach.

When I picked up the phone to call him, his first words to me were

“Before you start Samara, I need to tell you something.”

I struggled to bite my tongue as I was so eager to tell him my exciting news, but he started to tell me again that he is willing to commit all the money he has to serving God's Kingdom. Caring for these people in need and that I should not worry about the money. I tried to interrupt at that point, but again he said

“I want to tell you something else. I was just talking with my father. He had a dream last night.”

If there is one thing I know for sure about Dr A's father, it is that he has the most inspiring faith. It is very clear from many events over the years that he has a great prophetic gift. I had the privilege of spending a lot of time with Dr A's family while I was in Syria, and his parents are two very special people. I know that when Dr A tells me his father had a dream, it is something important. I managed to stop and listen to the dream.

His father dreamt last night that they were both standing on the seashore together. They started to walk into the water together, and they found that a great shoal of fish gathered around them. They weren't doing anything except walking into the water, but the fish came to them. His father took a stone and threw it into the water. Just one stone, but with that one stone, the fish died and floated to the top of the water. All they had to do was pick them out with their hands and put them into their basket. It was completely effortless. There were so many fish that they couldn't pick them all out, so they just took the largest and were able to fill their basket.

The funny thing is that I hadn't even told him about this extra money when he was excitedly telling me about this amazing dream of provision.

When he finally stopped, I could hardly contain myself any longer and spilled out my story of checking the banks accounts, the large anonymous donations, and how when I was willing to also include the £10,000 I had wanted to keep in reserve, we had enough to cover the full amount on that fund request letter.

He was so excited that he called his father while we were on the 'phone, and I asked his father to tell me his dream before I told him about the situation with the money. His father was laughing so happily when I told him what happened this morning. God is so good!

Later, Dr A called me back to tell me some further news. A few months ago we decided to sell a couple of the empty containers that we have sent our aid in to Syria to help cover some of the distribution costs. We had hoped we would get a good price for them and that we could sell quite a few to recoup some of the money, but in the end, no-one wanted to buy them. But this morning, someone called wanting to buy two of the containers, and he offered more than £1,000 more for each container than we paid for them here when we bought them in the UK. The amount he has offered will cover the remaining costs for the distribution in Deir Ez-zor that we have not yet been able to calculate.

We felt the dream, as well as the timing of it, were a great encouragement that we should keep going, focusing on meeting the needs, not arranging our work according to what we feel is affordable. If people only ever set out to do what they felt was achievable, nothing amazing would ever happen in this world.

Dr A told me after I gave him my good news that he felt that once he had been clear about being willing to give everything he has to serve God's children, giving his two fish and five loaves of bread, God opened the doors and has showed that He is willing to provide so much more when we give what we have.

Every miracle that took place in the Bible started with a problem, and so many of those miracles relate to provision. The beauty of these miracles is that God multiplies what people have, but only after they have been willing to give up what they have already got, even when it is just such a small amount. The feeding of the 5,000 took place, but only after the only food available, a measly two fish and five loaves of bread had been offered. Also, the story of Elisha and the olive oil in 2 Kings chapter 4. When this poor widow's son was about to be taken by a creditor into slavery to pay her debt, Elisha asked her what she had in the house. All she had was a jar of olive oil, yet God multiplied this to the point she had enough to sell it and pay all her debts and live in a comfortable situation.

Too often when we look at the big mountain in front of us, or the difficult road ahead of us, it seems to big and too complicated. Although I have seen so many of these amazing examples of how God provides for us in these situations when we make His Kingdom our priority, I still worry and get anxious sometimes. Working God's way, in faith, is completely at odds with working the way the World tells us is sensible.

When Jesus sent out first the 12 disciples, and then later the 72, he gave them instructions which, by worldly standards would be crazy: don't take a change of clothes, don't take a purse or any money. Don't take anything! He instructed them to rely solely on God to provide for them when going to unfamiliar places where they would be staying for some time.

How many of us would go on an overnight trip, let alone longer, without taking both money and a change of clothes? We are always taught to be prepared and to plan everything in advance. But God asks us to step out in faith and to depend on Him for everything we need. And that is what He asked me to do at the beginning of this amazing, life-changing, faith-building journey. I think this is always what he asks of all of us in our variety of different situations.

His instructions to me were to "start collecting." Not to start fundraising or start planning, just to start collecting first. He promised me that if I took that step of faith, He would provide everything that was needed along the way, and He has been faithful to this promise in every possible and impossible way, at every hurdle, and at every issue we have faced.

If you took a job working for a company and were expected to do certain essential tasks in this work, your employer would provide everything you need to do the work. If you had to travel you would be given a company car or the costs for travelling, if you needed tools to fix equipment, you would be given those tools. If you needed to send a lot of letters, your employer would provide paper, envelopes and stamps.

If that is what a worldly employer will give, how much more will our loving father in Heaven give when we commit to serving Him, His Kingdom and His children in need? It is only our limited human vision that reduces the possibilities of what he can do through us, and to fulfil our true potential. In Luke chapter 12 Jesus said "He will always give you all you need from day to day if you will make the Kingdom of God your primary concern."

So we will continue to make our decisions based on what it needed most, and where it is needed most. We will continue to walk in faith, and not make our decisions based just on what seems affordable. If my child or your child was like the one in the video above, filthy with ragged clothes and no shoes in the middle of winter, we would want others to do everything that can to help us because we need that help, not to walk away because it is too expensive to help. Sometimes we have to make sacrifices, but what we receive back will be infinitely more than anything we have ever given.

Thanks so much to everyone who has contributed to our essential and life-saving work. It really is a great privilege to be a part of it with you. In spite of the large sums of money quoted here, this is still the most cost effective way for us to provide for these people. This was for a very large convoy of 14 lorries, with an additional amount of another almost four lorries of food that were not

distributed by another NGO. Our team distributed it as it would have been looted and sold if our team hadn't taken responsibility for it. Those people really need this food.

As many of you know, we are starting our next appeal in January, and we are keen for as many of you as possible to be part of it. Helen has made a special request that everyone who is planning a collection in January contact her as soon as possible to let her know. At the moment she has just 40 people listed for this and she is very keen to get this list up to date as we are sure there are more who haven't told her. We will start publicising the collectors who are happy to receive donations around or just after new year, and it would be really great to have this list up to date as soon as possible. You can email her at [helen@samarasaidappeal.org](mailto:helen@samarasaidappeal.org)

My children are now on their school holidays until the beginning of January when our next appeal begins so I will be responding to non-urgent emails after that. Helen is still responding to emails about the next appeal [helen@samarasaidappeal.org](mailto:helen@samarasaidappeal.org)

For banking and standing orders you can email [accounts@samarasaidappeal.org](mailto:accounts@samarasaidappeal.org)

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Love

Samara

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