

The Faith Promise

Giving is Growing

A Mission with Churches
Our call is to reach
Everyone
Everywhere
All the Time

Christian writer Philip Yancey looked at what the Bible says about cheerful giving and responded, "No wonder. Once we understand giving's value to *ourselves*, not to the recipients, we can't help sneaking a grin."

The scriptural emphasis on giving, especially in the writings of the apostle Paul, is on the spiritual enrichment of the giver. Giving is its own reward: it is a way of growing.

Fund-raisers seem to have a problem with that. They think that if you want people to give to the church, you have to promise them something tangible in return: a book, a picture or a video — anything to prime the pump.

I wonder if such an approach does not actually diminish the biblical blessing promised to Christian givers. It certainly misses the main point why giving to the Lord is so important in the Christian life.

In essence, God's grace and our giving are related to each other as cause and effect in the larger experience of being born again.



The Vertical Factor

The Faith Promise method encouraged in The Christian and Missionary Alliance nurtures the special relationship between God and the giver. It is, in fact, based on that premise.

The Faith Promise card used in Alliance churches during your church's annual Missionary Convention, notes that in dependence upon God "*I promise by faith to give \$ _____ /week to help share the Gospel, over the next 12 months*".

The promise to support the ministries is to the Lord, not to a church or an organisation. The amount promised is based on two considerations: income the person expects to receive from known sources, plus an additional amount from unknown sources - that is where faith and prayer come in.

Dr. A. B. Simpson, our C&MA founder, summarised this approach as "*God's method of Christian giving, a fair proportion stretched to larger proportions by faith and loving sacrifice.*"

Paul had in mind this emphasis on the spiritual nature of giving when he wrote to the Corinthian Christians. He considered giving an essential grace that adorns the believer's life, not an obligation to an organisation. Paul thought church finances so important that one in every six verses of his second letter to the Corinthians returns to the subject. Grace and giving are closely intertwined, he stated. In chapters 8 and 9 he linked the two in six separate instances.

Nowhere in these "fund-raising" chapters do words like "tithe" or "obligation" appear. Not even "money" appears. Instead, Paul speaks of liberality, gift, fellowship, love and service, culminating in his appeal for support: "...see that you also excel in this grace of giving" (2 Corinthians 8:7, NIV). V. S. Azariah, first Indian bishop of the Anglican Church in India, wrote in his excellent book on the subject:

Where we see generous giving to God and His work, there we may recognise the work of God's Holy Spirit. Where there is a lack in this matter, we have to grieve—not primarily over inadequate giving, but chiefly over the lack of spiritual life.

Christian giving is thus one of the irreducibles of faith in action. As we are to love and pray and forgive, we also are to give. Some fund-raisers would banish the concept of "obedience" from fund appeals for Christian ministries, saying that this is a wrong and even potentially dangerous approach. Church analyst and futurist George Barna, however, warns:

We will be tempted to down-play the importance of commitment and obedience. We will be tempted to soften the truth so that a hardened generation will give us a fair hearing. There is a fine line between clever marketing and compromised spirituality.

Perhaps it was that fine line that bothered Philip Yancey as he spread on a table a month's accumulation of letters asking for money. Of the 62 appeals for religious causes, he noticed that "not one focused on my need as a Christian to honor God by fulfilling His command."

The need involved in giving is ours, not God's. Obedience to excel in the grace of giving is for our profit, not His. The Bible never says giving is a way of helping God out of a financial bind. That kind of mentality arises from our natural persistence to downscale God and, in this case, reduce Him to just another fund-raiser.

The truth is we need to give. God does not need to receive. Listen to His answer to those who entertain small thoughts about His solvency:

I have no need of a bull from your stall or goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. If I were hungry, I would not tell you. for the world is mine. and all that is in it. Psalm 50:9-10,12

Built-in Benefits

The Faith Promise method incorporates right reasons for giving to the Lord while excluding wrong ones. Chief among the right reasons are blessings that arise from the act itself. One such benefit is *spiritual enrichment*. Giving ranks with love and prayer as a spiritual exercise that leads a believer from infancy to maturity in faith.

Dr. Simpson encouraged this practice in the Alliance because "it makes room for God in our giving. We take Him by faith for more than we can see, and our faith is exercised, developed and enlarged as we meet the answer to our prayers."

Another built-in benefit of a Faith Promise, deliberately and prayerfully made, is *restraint on impulse giving*. Fund-raising techniques seem designed to motivate donors for the moment, not long-term. One financial analyst estimates that 70 percent of donations for religious purposes are spur-of-the-moment giving induced by a heart-wrenching TV special, social media post, an emotional mail appeal or a telemarketing crisis campaign. In contrast, he estimates that only 3 percent of donors control their giving by careful planning. Taking aim at impulse giving by Christians, Dr. A. W. Tozer commented:

Tender-hearted saints think with their feelings and pour out consecrated wealth indiscriminately on projects wholly unworthy of their support.

A Faith Promise approach also invests giving with significance. Some fund appeals trivialise giving to the Lord - as if skipping some needless expense and donating the amount to the church is all that God expects.

This kind of giving is not what Paul thought when he wrote, "... see that you also excel in this grace of giving."

A Faith Promise based on actual income and stretched by faith surpasses the trivial. Giving on a regular basis to a worthy ministry leaves the donor with a justifiable sense of accomplishment at the Faith Promise year's end.

As Dr. Simpson noted, "it gives the contributor something to work for, to plan for, to pray for, to look forward to."

Those who support worldwide ministries of the Alliance do so with confidence that their money is treated as seriously as their intent in giving.

Faith to Give

Constantly approached by His people for faith to receive from Him, would not the Lord be pleased at times to hear just the opposite - for faith to give to Him? Faith Promise giving must surely provide the Lord with a welcome change.

Educator Dr. John T. Seamands makes the telling point that

99 percent of the time we exercise faith to receive something from God.

We must exercise faith to give something for God and His mission in the world.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if more Alliance people became as serious in their giving as the Lord Jesus was in giving Himself for them?

Those who use the Faith Promise in their offerings need not be convinced of its value. They are enjoying the blessings inherent in serious and systematic giving to the Lord.

Not only do they experience personal enrichment and the joy of knowing they please God, they rejoice in the thousands of new believers and the hundreds of new churches that are started because they join with others in supporting Alliance ministries worldwide.

As Philip Yancey said, no wonder they are cheerful givers. They cannot help but grin as they reap blessing after blessing while putting their faith to work in giving to the Lord.

H O P E

Healthy Relationships

On Mission

People of Prayer

Empowered



The scriptural emphasis on giving is on the spiritual enrichment of the giver.

Giving is its own reward:
it is a way of growing.

With thanks to our C&MA worldwide family.



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