

KNOWING & DOING

C · S · LEWIS INSTITUTE



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Thoughts on Ministry Fundraising

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How many fundraising requests per week do you get via phone, letter, and other media from churches, ministries, and organizations? And when you get these appeals, what is your response and why? These are questions I've been pondering in recent months as I have been seeking to develop a godly approach to fundraising for the C.S. Lewis Institute. My conclusions are outlined below, and I would be grateful for any insights or comments you might have.

1. Trust God to Guide and Provide

To be faithful to God, a ministry must first seek the Lord's guidance and be certain that its vision, mission and methods are solidly grounded in Scripture and aligned with God's kingdom purposes. As the psalmist writes, "Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain" (Ps. 127:1).¹ Once this is settled, the ministry must trust the Lord to provide all of the human, material, and financial resources needed to accomplish the mission (Matt. 6:33). That is, there must be an active faith in God to supply what is needed for His work. Missionaries often put it this way, "Where God guides, He also provides." But this principle is not limited to missionary work — it applies to any work of God. One application of this principle is that a ministry should not rely on worldly fundraising methods, "proven marketing strategies," staff skills and abilities, or even generous people for its funding; rather, it should rely first and foremost on God and trust in Him.

2. Pray Daily

The first step in acknowledging our trust in God and dependence on Him for what is needed for ministry is to pray daily for His provision. Jesus teaches us to do this for our personal needs in the Lord's Prayer, when He says to



pray, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matt. 6:11). He also tells us that, as children of God, we are to be persistent in prayer and to continue asking, seeking, and knocking, knowing that our loving Father desires to give good gifts, especially to those who ask Him (Matt. 7:7–11). This same principle also applies to provision of resources for the work of His kingdom. One reason for a lack of provision in some ministries may be that they are relying on their own ideas and efforts and failing to ask (and trust) God to supply the need (James 4:2b–3).

3. Obey Daily

Another step in trusting God for provision is to listen to and obey His commands and directions. Throughout the Bible, we see that obedience to God is the path of blessing. Conversely, disobedience is the path to trouble. We can hinder God’s provision or miss it completely if we’re not following His direction. For example, “sin in the camp,” as seen in Joshua 7, can block God’s blessing from the ministry.

4. Share the Vision Truthfully and Transparently

In some cases, it may be appropriate to privately pray about a need without relating it to anyone else. This was the method used by George Müller, the director of the Ashley Down orphanages in Bristol, England. As recounted in his autobiography, he made his needs known to God alone in prayer, and the Lord sent many millions of dollars over six decades to sustain the ministry to orphans. God can and does still ask some to follow this method on certain occasions.

However, in most cases, in order to get more people involved and invested in the ministry, it is good to make ministry needs known to God’s people in a clear and accurate manner. In this way, they are better able to pray specifically for the work and do the spiritual warfare necessary for it to stand firm against the schemes of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Presenting the vision involves telling of the plans, the programs, and the needs of the ministry. Sharing this with others should be done honestly, truthfully, transparently, and faithfully, so they will have a clear understanding of what the Lord has called the ministry to do, how it is fulfilling that call, and what is needed to carry the work forward. Hudson Taylor, the great pioneer missionary to China, believed that his ministry should practice

“full information, but not solicitation.” In this way, he could be sure that people had the information they needed to understand what God was doing in the mission, without asking them directly for funds or gifts. He trusted God to speak to their hearts and guide their giving.



5. Invite People to Give Willingly and Freely

A classic Old Testament example of making a public appeal for support of God’s work is seen in Exodus 25 when God commands Moses to ask the people to take up an offering for the construction of the tabernacle. God even gives Moses the exact items for which he is to ask, including gold, silver, yarn, skins, wood, and oil. We see a similar example in 1 Chronicles 29, when King David asks Israel to follow his example and give up their finest metals, wood, gemstones, etc., for the construction of the temple. In the New Testament, Paul invites the Corinthian believers to give generously to support their struggling brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. And he cites the impoverished churches in Macedonia as an exemplary model of such generosity.

Thus, there is ample biblical precedent for publicly inviting people to give to specific ministries and projects. The key, however, is in the way the invitation to give is extended.

Exodus 25:1–2 reads, “The LORD said to Moses, ‘Speak to the people of Israel that they take for me a contribution. *From every man whose heart moves him* you shall receive the contribution for me’” (emphasis added). These verses show us that not everyone will give, and that only those people whose hearts are moved will do so. Thus, when inviting people to give, a ministry should trust the Lord to work in the hearts of His people and never presume upon anyone to give, or coerce or pressure anyone to give, as a gift should be received only as a person’s heart is moved to give.

This principle is reiterated when David invites the nation of Israel to give. He states it in this way: “Who then will offer *willingly*, consecrating himself today to the LORD?” (1 Chron. 29:5b, emphasis added). The result of this gracious invitation is that the leaders make their “*freewill offerings.*” 1 Chron. 29:9 states, “Then the people rejoiced because they had given willingly, for with a whole heart *they had offered freely to the LORD.* David the king also rejoiced greatly” (emphasis added).

Thus, whenever an invitation is extended to others to support a ministry, it should be done in a way that encourages people to give freely from their hearts as an offering to the Lord. Paul reinforces this when he writes in 2 Corinthians 9:7, “Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” Nothing should be done to coerce, pressure, induce guilt, or manipulate anyone to give. If any nonbiblical tactics or words are used to force or manipulate a gift, it is no longer a godly and gracious invitation, but a sinful, man-led means of trying to do God’s work in man’s way.

Another very important principle to remember when asking people to support a ministry is that an invitation to give should never be tainted with an appeal to the donor’s pride, a practice all too common today. In Matthew 6:1–4, Jesus clearly states that people should not give to the needy to obtain earthly honor; rather, they should give in secret so as to receive a heavenly reward. Ministries must be careful not to entice people to give by publicizing their generosity. This is nothing but an appeal to pride. It can work with people who want to increase their status and prestige in the eyes of others, but it is not God’s way.

It is important to guard our hearts and seek to remain pure before the Lord; instead of loving money and using people, ministries should love people and use any money that is given to support the Lord’s work.

6. Be Grateful—Give Thanks to God and Donors

Once a gift has been given to a ministry, whether it is for one dollar or a million dollars, it should be seen as God’s provision for His work and received with thanksgiving and joy. 1 Timothy 4:4 states that all good gifts should be received “with thanksgiving.” Jesus sets the example for our prayers of thanksgiving in the feeding of the four thousand. When He had received the gifts of the loaves and fishes, He gave thanks to the Lord for these gifts and then multiplied them.

After thanking God for His provision, it is important to thank the person through whom He sent it. Paul sets an example for us in 1 Thessalonians 1:2–3, when he tells the church of Thessalonica that he thanks God for them and their labor of love and work of faith. Thanks should be given in a timely manner, clearly expressing appreciation to the supporter.



7. Accountability—Be Good Stewards of the Gifts

Once a gift has been received by a ministry, it should be administered carefully and forthrightly, to ensure that there is no question of impropriety about its use. As Paul wrote upon the reception of a gift, “that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us” (2 Cor. 8:20).

These are my thoughts thus far. As I said previously, I would be grateful for any thoughts you might have as I seek to formalize the principles by which the C.S. Lewis Institute will operate in the future. ❖

I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare.

C.S. Lewis

Note

1. Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.



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