

Giving at Christ City Church - Motivation is Everything



It has been said that “every Christian needs two conversions - one for his heart, and the other for his wallet.” Why? Well Jesus tells us that money is one of God’s greatest rivals. He famously said “No man can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” (Matthew 6:24).

A careful reading of the four gospels reveals that Jesus said much more about money than he did about heaven. Twelve of his thirty-eight parables have to do with money. Why does Jesus have so much to say about money? Because what we do with our money reveals our hearts. What we do with our money really matters to God.

In this paper I want to outline five principles the Bible lays out for giving, and how we practice them at Christ City Church. For practical details on how to give please read our ‘how to give’ leaflet.

(1) Motivation is everything

Very famously and often (mis)quoted at wedding ceremonies, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3:

“If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.”

Paul is telling us that you can give lots of money away to the poor; you can even give over your physical body for the sake of a good charitable cause; but if your motivation is not love (love for God and others) then in the end your giving and support of charitable causes is worthless in God’s eyes. Strong words!

But this makes sense with regards to every ‘good work’ we do. If I help an old granny across the road because I want others to notice me (improve my reputation) and to feel better (improve my self-worth) then I am not helping the granny out of love but out of self-interest. Selfishness is at the heart of my good works!

When it comes to giving, most of us wish the church wouldn’t talk about it. The problem with that is that Jesus talked about it all the time and if we say we’re a follower of Jesus and belong to one his local communities (eg. Christ City Church) then, as the famous phrase goes, we need to ‘put our money where our mouths are’.

Now I appreciate that ‘The Church’ (in general) has made a mess of this in the past and there has been lots of misuse of church funds by those in positions of power (e.g. Judas, who we are told in John 12:6 would regularly take from the common purse). However we can’t let past failure dictate what God wants us to do. Apart from these more sinister problems, the church typically makes three mistakes when talking about money.

Mistake 1 – Use Pride

This motivation is demonstrated in the scenario above in walking the old granny across the road. The church leader aims to make the donor feel good about themselves for giving, it seeks to consciously or subconsciously inflate the ego of the giver by telling them how fantastic they are for their act of generosity, how integral they are to the mission of the charity, putting their name on a plaque etc.

Mistake 2 - Use Guilt

Here the church leader tugs at the heartstrings by moving pictures of the plight of someone in need and the implication is clearly given that a failure to give could result in further human suffering. This is rarely articulated but the message is pretty clear. We give out of duty, which comes from a sense of guilt.

Mistake 3 - Use Fear

This is really a spin off from mistakes 1 and 2 where the donor (who doesn't give) is made to feel like they are a bad Christian and that God won't accept them because they don't give - "God is going to get you, you stingy person!"

So what should motivate us to give?

Grace

This is how the Apostle Paul puts it in arguably the most important verse in the entire bible on the subject of giving:

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.” (2 Corinthians 8:9)

When we understand what Jesus has done for us (he became poor) and what that means for our life and eternity (we become rich), then everything changes.

- **Pride goes** - we no longer need other people's approval or an improved self-esteem from giving; Jesus' approval and Jesus' value of us trumps them all!
- **Guilt goes** - we no longer need to feel guilty and duty driven. Jesus is the saviour of the world (not me) and whilst I have a part to play, I can trust that he is working all things out for good.
- **Fear goes** - we no longer need to feel that we are 'bad Christians'. God accepts us, not on the basis of our (imperfect) performance but on the basis of Jesus' (perfect) performance on our behalf. This is the heart of the gospel; we don't get to heaven by being good but by believing in Jesus.

When I say 'fear goes', it is true to say a battle is still raging in our hearts and minds as we so often resort back to worldly motivations. However, once we have applied the gospel of grace to our hearts, it will drive out pride, guilt and fear!

As we apply the gospel to our hearts, we realise that God is the great giver in the world. He gives us his Son who, out of his riches, becomes poor so that we might, through him, become rich. So now in response, our hearts are unlocked to give. We do not give to get anything in return but rather give out of God's abundance.

Ultimately, everything we have comes from God. We are only stewards of what he has given us. Our challenge is to cultivate generosity with our money (towards others) and cultivate trust in our hearts (towards him).

Application – at Christ City Church we would genuinely prefer you not to give, than to give out of pride, guilt or fear.

Please note that being motivated to do something doesn't mean you always 'want' to do something. I don't want to go to the gym, but a motivation to keep fit means I go. I don't want to get up 5.30am on a Saturday morning to take my 3 year-old daughter to the toilet, but my love (and duty!) as a father means I do.

Whilst our motivation in giving will never be 100% pure until heaven, the key thing is to examine your heart, examine what the Bible says (below) and then make a commitment to give for the right reasons.

So let's now talk about some other principles we learn in the Bible about giving. These will link to our motivation.

(2) Give Secretly

Jesus could not be clearer on this and it is the number one way to test our motives. In Matthew 6:1-4, in the middle of his 'Sermon on the Mount' he says:

“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

Jesus knows our hearts and he knows we will do good works and give money to impress others. That's what hypocrites do and they receive their reward in full, which is simply human praise on earth. However, someone who has understood grace will give in secret so that only our Father in heaven sees and therefore the reward is eternal.

Application – decide in your heart what you want to give and then give secretly. The best way to give secretly is through standing order. However, you can do it discreetly on a Sunday through the post box.

So give in secret to please your Father in heaven, not to impress others.

(3) Give Generously

In 2 Corinthians 8-9 we have the largest section of teaching in the New Testament on the subject of giving.

Paul is encouraging the Corinthian church to “excel in the grace of giving” (8:7). In this case he was urging them to give to poorer Christians in another part of the world. He wanted them to support his leadership and vision, in order to bring blessing to others.

And he says in verses 8-11 (quoting Psalm 112):

“And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written:

‘They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures for ever.’

Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.”

Paul wants the Corinthians to know that God will bless generous giving, maybe with further financial provision on earth (although this is never promised), but certainly in character development, godliness and joy which is a harvest of righteousness.

For Paul it is clear, since Jesus gave everything up for us: leaving the riches of heaven, being carried in the womb of a poor, humble young woman, born amongst animals and shepherds, living a life of obscurity and rejection and ultimately dying a shameful and painful death on a cross...since he gave all that, we should give generously back, trusting that God will provide our every need.

Application – do not think “what is the least I can give to get away with it?” but “what is the most I can give and still maintain a balanced lifestyle?” Looking to give the minimum not only reveals a lack of trust in God and a lack of understanding that you are purely a steward of his gifts. It also means you haven’t applied grace and the generosity of Christ to your heart.

So give generously in response to God’s generous gift of Christ to you, as well as money and talents he has gifted you with.

(4) Give Willingly & Joyfully

As you can probably see, everything stems from our motivation and all the other points are inextricably linked. But in 1 Corinthians 8:12 and 9:7, Paul has two very direct commands we need to obey:

“For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.”

“Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

He went on to say: “I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others” (8:8). He held up the Macedonian Christians who gave out of their poverty as an example of people who had received the grace of God (8:1-5). Their giving revealed their hearts. Ultimately their hearts had been transformed by the grace of God.

Application – decide in your heart what to give, take a further moment to pray and see if you can give more, then thank God that you can give it and ask him to bless your giving to extend his kingdom. Give joyfully to him and his mission on earth.

So give willingly and joyfully because this is not a duty but a privilege and, as we keep seeing, motivation counts for everything in God’s eyes.

(5) Give Proportionately & Sacrificially

This principle of giving proportionally in response to what God has given you runs throughout the whole Bible (e.g. Deuteronomy 16:17). This is fleshed out fully in the Old Testament where we come across the idea of a 'tithe' which means tenth (e.g. Deuteronomy 26). When you add up all the tithes that are to be given in the Old Testament, an obedient Israelite (like Boaz in the book of Ruth) would give around 22-23% of their wealth.

In addition to the yearly tithes, God's people were (in theory but as far as we know it never happened in practice) supposed to cancel all debts every 7 years and return back the land to its owner every 49 years (see Deuteronomy 15 and Leviticus 25).

What is interesting is that the tithe is never picked up in the New Testament, except in one negative statement by Jesus (Matthew 23.23-24) where he criticizes the Pharisees for giving away a tenth of their possessions whilst neglecting the more important matters of justice, mercy and faithfulness.

So why does the tithe disappear in the New Testament? Because the standard of a New Testament believer is no longer a tenth but the cross! And if the tenth was good enough for the Old Testament believer, how much more reason do we have to give more generously in the new!

So do we teach that every person at Christ City Church should tithe? No! We don't. Each person must decide in his or her heart what to give and give generously and willingly. However, each person is encouraged to give proportionately. For example in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 Paul says (with regards to the offering the Macedonian churches were making for the poorer churches in Jerusalem):

“Now about the collection for the Lord's people: do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.”

We are to give 'in keeping with our income'. If the tithe was a good principle to work from in the Old Testament, it still provides a helpful parameter, so do use it in your thinking. However if the cross is our standard, maybe a helpful way of viewing proportional giving is to think about sacrifice and cost.

Famously, Jesus tells the story of the widow in Luke 21:1-4 who gives two copper coins which is compared with far greater sums that were given by rich people. Her gift was seen as more generous in God's eyes than the others even though they gave more because she, out of her poverty, put in all she had to live on, whereas the others just gave the surplus of their wealth. It cost them nothing, there was no sacrifice and in that sense it was not proportional.

For some of you giving 5-10% of your income is a huge sacrifice and God will honour that. For others of you more than 10% would be truly sacrificial and therefore proportional. As a friend of mine once said “in view of the cross, a tenth is a great place to start and a terrible place to finish!” And if you're a student, consider giving €10 a month as a starting point.

Application – have you done a budget of your own income and outgoings? Have you decided in your heart a percentage you want to give away? Again, the best way to do this is through standing order. This not only enables us to budget and plan as a church but enables you to give strategically and proportionately.

Give proportionately and sacrificially in accordance to how God has blessed you financially.

Summary

Here is how I think the five principles work themselves out diagrammatically. Our motivation is at the centre, and the other four principles are an outworking of the work of grace on our hearts.



As you decide whether you want to give financially to Christ City Church, read over the five principles and examine your own heart. Then pray and give in accordance with each of the principles.

When David took an offering to build the temple in the Old Testament (1 Chronicles 29) it says the people gave willingly, freely and wholeheartedly (verse 9) and they collected far more than was needed or what David had asked for. In response David quite rightly said:

“But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.” (verse 14)

Ultimately, everything we have comes directly from his hand so all we are doing is giving it back to him. We cannot fulfil all that God has for us to do in the city without money, so please do consider what you can give.

May I urge you, like the people of Israel and the Macedonians, to give what you are able to give but also to give secretly, generously, willingly, joyfully and proportionately? As we have continually seen, the heart and motivation from which we give is more important than the amount, but the amount is still significant to God.

May we, Christ City Church, excel in the grace of giving!