

MUSIC and FAITH

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Collection for the Lord's People

(Part Two of a two part series on Christian giving)

LIKE most other organizations, churches and para-church groups need financial income to carry on their work. Asking members for money, however, can be a rather challenging experience given the level of sensitivity people have towards their pockets. However a study of the Bible suggests that such a mentality is non-Scriptural and is the result of a failure of both the part of organizations and individuals in their understanding of Biblical principles towards the use of money. A closer look at the writings of Moses, David and Paul suggests that fundraising is not a secular activity, but a biblically mandated work of grace that God's people should participate in.

A Willing Heart

First and foremost, we need to appeal to a willing heart. There is little use in trying to convince a person (using strong-arm tactics) that he/she needs to give. In his commandment to Moses, God said, *"Tell the Israelites to take an offering for me; from every person whose heart makes him willing you are to receive my offering."* (Exodus 25:2) Interestingly, this fund-raising drive came shortly after the golden-calf incident and people could have been easily manipulated to give out of a guilty conscience. But God would have none of it. Instead, Moses solicitation (Ex 35:4-9) was exactly what God told him to, a faithful word-for-word rendering of what God told him to and what it was for. And the results of such an appeal were astounding, so much was being offered that the people had to be restrained from bringing anymore because there was simply so much that was already given (Ex 36:5-6). In fact, this story is amazingly God-centred. God is present in every step of the process: May we also be honest with our needs, never to pressure others to give nor to misrepresent the reason for giving.

Furthermore, it is specifically recorded that the offering was made to the Lord, not to the tabernacle (Ex 35:5). In this we see that the people's relationship *with* God took precedence over what they did *for* God. As a choral ministry, we need to help our members to have a proper understanding of who God is instead of getting them to give, without due concern of their lives before God. A truly willing heart is built upon the foundation of a right relationship with God.

Setting an Example

In David's exhortation towards the building of the Lord's temple, he himself led his people by personal example thus demonstrating his personal commitment towards the project (1 Ch 29:3-5). Following his example were the leaders of Israel, and the people – all who contributed with a willing attitude (1 Ch 29:6-9). As Christians we sometimes make the mistake that giving to God ought to be an entirely private matter (not letting the left hand know what the right hand is doing) and that any attempt to publicly exemplify the act of giving is wrong. In fact Jesus himself had his disciples watch people publicly give their gifts at the Temple and praised the gift of the old woman.

At the heart of the issue then is our motivation for giving (1 Ch 29:17). Jesus was not trying to tell us to *avoid being publicly seen at all costs* but rather to tell us not to do our acts of righteousness *merely to be seen by people*. To set an example sometimes necessitates that we are seen, and in such instances, to be seen doing the right thing. King David recognized that God ultimately is the source and recipient of all giving, and thus there was no room for pride and boasting. "But who am I and who are my people, that we should be in a position to contribute this much? Indeed, everything comes from you, and we have simply given back to you what is yours." (1 Ch 29:14). Rather than

trying to receive praise, David attributes praise to God and leads the people in praising God. Not only did he leverage his position to influence the leaders, he is also setting an example for an older generation fundraising for a younger generation (1 Ch 29:10).

Motivating others to give

Finally, in Paul's letter to the Corinthian church (2 Cor 8-9), the apostle did not dodge the question of collecting money for God's people, but instead uses the Macedonian church as an example in spurring the Corinthian church to give. According to Paul, the Macedonian church despite going through a difficult period, did not cease from giving to Paul's ministry but on the contrary "their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity" (8:2). Often times, how much we give is dependent on our life (financial) circumstances. Placing our own well-being and security above all, we only give after we have first taken care of ourselves, a vast contrast from that of the Macedonian church. What is left over, not what we choose to leave behind, becomes the basis of our giving to the needs of others.

Paul also emphasized that the Macedonian church gave beyond their ability and all without any form of coercion, even to the extent of pleading for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people (8:3-4). What is depicted here is a marvellous picture of commitment and dedication by God's people to God's work. In doing so, Paul subsequently makes mention of his wish to "test the sincerity" of the Corinthian church's love by "comparing it with the earnestness of others." (8:8). By doing so, Paul was not trying to psychologically play on the consciences of the Corinthian church, but rather by doing so, he hoped to remind them on how their love of Christ should be evidenced, that is, by the act of giving – willingly, generously and sacrificially.

Living in Singapore, we are given much in material resources, compared to other Christian brothers and sisters living in other parts of the world. Yet, all too often we do not recognize these blessings and instead we take them for granted and complain we are not given more. May it be that God would open our eyes to see a more wonderful reality and that our faith would be strengthened as we participate in the work of God's Kingdom here on earth.

For more resources on fund-raising using Scriptural principles, see <http://fundraisingcoach.com/free-articles/fundraising-in-the-bible/>