

Giving: The Three Questions

Week 2 | To Whom?

The Engage God Daily for this series is a reprint of Senior Pastor, Bruce Miller's book, Giving: The Three Questions.

This week, we are reprinting Chapter 2 of Giving: Three Questions. Last week we considered why we should give. This week, we're answering the second question, "To whom should we give?"

Day 1

On Monday, your Facebook feed shows you tragic pictures of a cute 6-year-old girl with bone cancer, and an old friend from high school is asking you to donate.

Your email box has two requests from Christian organizations sharing the latest urgent needs from the famine in Ethiopia, and the plight of young teenage girls being sex trafficked in Thailand.

The same day, two newsletters come by snail mail with an appeal for giving to a scholarship fund for your alma mater, and another to your local food bank.

Meanwhile, your local church receives an offering every Sunday. Your wife's brother who is a single dad, lost his job, and his severance ran out, so he and his two kids need help with basic needs.

On top of these giving opportunities, one of your college roommates serves as a missionary in India, and you agreed to support him on a monthly basis, but you also want to sponsor a needy child in a third-world country which requires a monthly financial commitment.

Sound familiar? Most of us are inundated with requests from charities and good causes to the point that it can be overwhelming. Requests come from the big organizations, such as the Red Cross, and from good causes, such as curing breast cancer. And often someone you know is involved. My daughter-in-law worked for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. Crowd-funded appeals and the latest disaster compete for our charitable giving.

It can be confusing as to where you should give your money. How do you make wise choices for where to invest your giving dollars? My hope is to give you biblical clarity about divine priorities for your giving.

Three criteria apply to all giving opportunities. The first criterion is integrity. You should only give to organizations who have integrity. Sadly, some people use charitable causes to get rich. There are scams out there. Check if the head of the organization has an exorbitant salary, lives in a mansion or is buying private planes. See if there is an external audit or approval from an outside accrediting organization such as the EFCA (the Evangelical Council on Financial Accountability).

Secondly, you should give to organizations that are effective. Check out how a group or organization is using the money. Are they actually doing the good work they claim to do? See if they publish a report that shows their results. If you can do so, visit the organization or the area in which they are serving to see what's really happening.

Thirdly, look for transparency. At Christ Fellowship, we are committed to the highest integrity and effectiveness. And we are transparent with our finances. You, along with anyone in the world, can go to the Christ Fellowship website, www.cfhome.org. Click on "Giving." Scan down and you will see the same monthly report that goes to our Elder Board, then you can check out links to our financial policies, procedures and budget. We also post our annual external audit. We are open with our finances.

Good organizations have policies such as ones that guard against conflict of interest, that require double signatures on checks, and that limit who has access to a credit card.

At Christ Fellowship, every dollar is committed to our mission of being people helping people find and follow Christ, and we stretch each dollar. We are frugal. Every year when our auditor meets with the Elders, he compliments the Christ Fellowship finance team for having among the best practices of any church they audit.

Knowing you should give to organizations that have high integrity, effectiveness, and transparency, are there places God would have you prioritize in your giving?

We'll consider that for the rest of the week.

Reflect

This question regarding to whom we should give surfaces our values and exposes our priorities. If you are married, your giving priorities are likely not the same as your spouse's. Looking to God's Word can help you come to unity, at least on the overarching biblical priorities for where you send your giving.

Many people have never thought very hard about what kinds of organizations or needs should have priority in our giving decisions, but it's an important question to answer.

Take some time to reflect on your current attitude about giving:

- What kinds of requests do you get for financial support? Which ones tend to grab your attention? Why?

- To whom do you regularly give or donate money? How do you currently prioritize your giving?
- What criteria do you use when deciding to whom you will give?

Day 2

This week, we are reprinting Chapter 2 of Bruce Miller's book, Giving: Three Questions. We're answering the question, "To whom should you give?"

Today we're going to consider the first priority for giving that the Bible outlines.

There are three places that have biblical, divine priority. The first is to your church family.

To your church family

In the Old Testament, before the founding of the church, God's people were to support the temple, including providing for the priests and Levites who served in the temple. The priests and temple workers would be roughly equivalent to church staff today.

In the New Testament, over 90 percent of the references to "church" (in Greek, *ekklesia*) are to local, visible organized communities of people. The book of Acts records the founding and multiplying of local churches. There were no parachurch ministries, no schools, mission agencies or radio ministries. The biblical passages on giving are written to local churches, such as the church in Corinth.

Consider the nature of the local church. Biblically, the church is the family of the Father, the body of Jesus Christ the Son, and the temple of the Holy Spirit. It is not simply one more non-profit organization created by humans. Rather, the church is a divine entity like marriage and family. Other good ministries and organizations are not parallel to the church nor do they replace the church. Churches are supernatural. So local churches today are divine organisms who are God's primary expression of his kingdom. And as such, your local church deserves priority in your financial giving.

The church is your spiritual family. Giving should start with your family. Every member in a healthy family contributes to the family. And rightly, you put family first.

Further, the Bible makes it clear that you have a responsibility to financially support those who teach, lead and care for you in local churches. To the Galatians, Paul writes,

Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor (Galatians 6:6).

And he gave direction to Timothy for the church in Ephesus,

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor [a reference to financial support], especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For Scripture says, “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,” and “The worker deserves his wages” (1 Timothy 5:17–18).

Let me just confess that it is awkward to make this point as one who serves as a pastor in a local church, but it’s the truth. Biblically, if you are being ministered to by church staff, you should financially support them so they can devote their time to teach and care for you and your children.

After extensive study on giving, in one of the most well-regarded books on the topic, author Gene Getz concludes, “The local church should be God’s primary context for both systematic giving and maintaining accountability in the area of material possessions.”¹ He advises, “A good rule of thumb is for Christians to give at least 10 percent of their income to their local churches before they support additional ministries.”² Christian author Randy Alcorn says similarly, “Normally, I believe, the firstfruits, or tithe, should go directly to the local church.”³ Whether the amount is 10 percent or not, I agree with Getz and Alcorn that the biblical priority is to give to your local church as your spiritual family. The second biblical priority is to give to those in need.

We’ll explore giving to those in need tomorrow.

Reflect

- How does the truth that your local church is your spiritual family, guide the priority of your giving?
- Do you give regularly to your local church? Why or why not?

Day 3

This week, we are reprinting Chapter 2 of Bruce Miller’s book, Giving: Three Questions. We’re answering the question, “To whom should you give?” Today we’re considering the next biblical priority for our giving, giving to those in need.

To those in need

You see God’s special heart for those in need in both the Old and New Testaments. He has special concern for orphans, widows and the oppressed. Proverbs affirms,

¹ Gene A. Getz, *Real Prosperity* (Moody Press, Chicago, 1990), 124.

² Getz, *Rich in Every Way* (Howard Publishing, West Monroe, Louisiana, 2004), 314.

³ Randy Alcorn, *Money, Possessions and Eternity* (Tyndale House, Wheaton, Illinois, 1989), 268.

Those who give to the poor will lack nothing, but those who close their eyes to them receive many curses (Proverbs 28:27).

People in our church family

Of all those in need, our responsibility first is to those in our own church family. The parable of the sheep and the goats speaks to fellow believers. At the final judgment, the King will separate the people as a shepherd separates sheep and goats based on how a person met the needs of the least of our brothers and sisters. Jesus said,

Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?” The King will reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:31–40).

In the book of Acts, we read about how the first church lived out what Jesus asked:

For there was no one needy among them, because those who were owners of land or houses were selling them and bringing the proceeds from the sales and placing them at the apostles’ feet. The proceeds were distributed to each, as anyone had need (Acts 4:34–35).

The believers gave to the church and the church distributed funds to those in need. There was no one needy among them. We want the same reality in our local churches today. If anyone in a local church lacks daily food, adequate clothes or a place to live, we take care of each other. Of course, a church should perform due diligence to ensure the needs are legitimate and that the help is truly helping, not enabling.

Your church likely has a benevolence fund. At Christ Fellowship, our “Love Fund” is our fund to care for those in need in our church family first, and then those in our community in need. We distribute 100 percent of those funds directly to people as we verify the need, and help them to thrive long-term financially and spiritually. Not only do we give to people in need in our church family, but we also support people in our community.

People in our community

Among the many proverbs about giving to the needy, Proverbs 19:17 gives a promise:

Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward them for what they have done (Proverbs 19:17).

Jesus makes this truth come alive in his story of the Good Samaritan. You may remember that a nameless man was attacked, beaten and robbed, then left on the side of the road. While a priest and a Levite passed by on the other side of the road, an everyday Samaritan took care of the hurt man. At the end of the story Jesus asked,

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise” (Luke 10:36–37).

The Bible calls us to show financial mercy to people in need in our community, including those of different ethnicities and beliefs.

It’s a joy to help people in our local community. The people of Christ Fellowship have done food drives, bought Christmas Angel Tree gifts, repaired homes, and much more. One home that needed repair ended up becoming a much bigger project that took months and far more money than we anticipated. Members of the church took an interest in the homeowner and when he was losing his eyesight, they took him to doctor appointments and have helped in many practical ways, perhaps most of all by being faithful friends.

In December a few years ago, a tornado brought disaster to our community including two families in Blue Ridge, a town in northern Collin County. The Santillano’s mobile home was shredded, but much worse, their three-day old, newborn little girl was killed. In addition, the Gonzalez family of nine, including a special needs girl lost their home and vehicles. Two leaders from Christ Fellowship, Bob and Terry, worked with a group of churches and agencies to verify needs and bring help. Immediate needs for food and clothing were covered, but both families needed a place to live. Through people’s generosity, we were able to provide two new manufactured homes fully furnished! I had so much joy being there to see their smiles and tears when the families walked in the door of their new homes for the first time.

Giving brings so much joy! It starts a cascade of joy, a chain reaction of smiles. There is a third biblical priority for where we should give. In addition to your local church and to those in need, we should prioritize giving to global missions.

We’ll discuss giving to global missions tomorrow.

Reflect

- Why should we help take care of those in our church body who are in financial need?
- What is God’s opinion of those who give to those in need? Why is it a joy to help them?
- How can you assist those in financial need in your church and community?

Day 4

This week, we are reprinting Chapter 2 of Bruce Miller's book, Giving: Three Questions. We're answering the question, "To whom should you give?" Today we're considering the final biblical priorities for our giving.

To global missions (*Propempo*)

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the only hope for each one of us. It is the most important message. The Apostle Paul wrote,

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3).

The gospel shares the way anyone is saved eternally.

Jesus said that his followers are to be witnesses to the entire world, to the ends of the earth. To do that, we must go and send people to bring the message. In the book of Romans, we read,

For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" (Romans 10:13–15).

When you give to global workers (missionaries), you invest in the gospel.

This is a biblical model. In the four gospels, you can see that people financially supported Jesus and his disciples. This model continues with the apostles. People in the churches sent out missionaries (global workers) with financial assistance.

One Greek word is used seven times in the New Testament with a specific focus on giving to missionaries. The word is *propempō*. It means to assist someone in making a journey, to *send on one's way* with food and money. *Propempō* became an early Christian term that was used to exhort, compel and even command believers to send individuals or teams of gospel workers on their way with all the needed resources to make their journey a success.

In 3 John, John writes a personal letter to a believer named Gaius, who had recently funded a team of visiting missionaries. John encouraged him to continue his funding,

Please send them on their way [propempo] in a manner that honors God. It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. We ought therefore to show hospitality to such people so that we may work together for the truth (3 John 6b–8).

This giving to global workers is a biblical command to *propempo*, to financially assist those who are going to bring the gospel to the world. When you give to them, you become partners with them.

Other Giving Priorities

Given that these are God’s three priority recipients for our giving, how are we to consider other charitable opportunities such as to our university’s scholarship fund, the Red Cross, and the American Heart Association? What about giving to personal crises such as the little girl with cancer? Needs such as these fall under the broad biblical direction that we are to do good to all. The Apostle Paul writes this advice to the believers in Galatia,

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers (Galatians 6:10).

So on top of giving first to your local church, and then to those in need and to global missions, you should also take the opportunity to do good beyond that. Often this kind of giving aims at the second priority of giving to those in need.

My wife and I regularly give to the North Texas Food Bank, especially when they offer double or triple matching for our gifts. We have given to a GoFundMe account for a friend with cancer. These tend to be smaller gifts for us and not as regular.

The instruction to do good *especially* to those who belong to the family of believers encourages you to focus on personal relationships. Before giving to someone you do not know whether in your community or around the world, give to someone you know personally, especially if they are in your church.

What about giving to people in your own family who have fallen on hard times? Sometimes older parents have not saved enough to provide for their needs later in life. Also, sometimes young adults fail to launch well or make early costly mistakes. The Apostle Paul gave this instruction to his associate Timothy for the Christians in Ephesus,

But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God.... Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever (1 Timothy 5:4, 8).

However, this instruction does not mitigate your obligation to put priority on giving to your church, to those in need and to global missions. Taking care of your family is in a different category of financial stewardship. For instance, putting food on the table for your kids is not “giving” to them but carrying out part of your fundamental responsibility to provide for your family. In other words, it would be wrong to say to yourself, “I’m giving money to my mother-in-law to pay her rent, so I’m not going to give money to the church.”

Reflect

- Given the importance of the gospel message, how does this passage show us the priority of giving to global missions?

- How can you help support global workers?
- How does giving to good causes fit into your overall giving plan?
- How does financially helping people in your family fit in your overall stewardship of your finances?

Day 5

This week, we are reprinting Chapter 2 of Bruce Miller's book, Giving: Three Questions. We've been answering the question, "To whom should you give?" Today, let's reflect on what we've learned and think about how we'll apply God's Word to our lives.

Reflect

Our generous giving responds to God's prior and overwhelming generosity to us. God is the greatest giver who gave the greatest gift, his one and only Son. Giving worships God, honoring him as the incomparable triune God. Giving expresses gratitude to God for his uncountable gifts to us, so many spiritual blessings and life eternal. Giving is fun. It's a blast. Giving blesses others. It meets needs and advances the gospel. Giving makes an eternal investment and eternal difference. Giving blesses you. It will bring you joy as you bring others joy and, most importantly, it brings God joy. That's the generosity effect, a cascade of smiles, a joy chain reaction.

And to whom do you give to experience this joy? We discovered three biblical priorities for our giving:

1. To our church family
2. To those in need
3. To global workers

Move to Action

Take some time to think deeply about your giving priorities:

At the beginning of the week, you thought through your current giving priorities. How are you currently prioritizing your giving? If you're not giving consistently, what steps do you need to take to be able to regularly give?

Based on what you've learned this week, are you feeling led to make any changes in your priorities? If you're married, set aside time to discuss this with your spouse.