

Giving: The Three Questions

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

After raising five kids, I'm proud of my wife for going back to college later in life to earn a master's degree in Speech Language Pathology at Texas Women's University (TWU). In God's grace, Tamara secured a job even before she graduated. What this meant financially is that we were no longer paying for school, and we had a new income stream.

After hearing an inspiring message on God's generosity to us, Tamara and I were motivated to prayerfully reconsider our giving. It was such a blast to see how much more money we could give. We took the money we were paying for her tuition and re-directed it to our church's capital campaign. Then, from her new income, we increased our regular giving to our church's general ministries. And we set aside more money to give to others' needs that might come up the next year.

At the end of that year, we took some time to get away, just the two of us. We reserved a primitive cabin in an Oklahoma state park with a fireplace, and no Wi-Fi, which was a great place for us to unplug and reconnect with God and each other. During that time, we looked over our giving for the year and prayerfully decided to give extra gifts to the church, but it was December 30th—how would we do it?

We left the cabin and found a McDonald's in order to use their Wi-Fi so we could log on to the church's website and to our bank, so that we could give our extra gifts to the church. It was fun for us. It made us smile so big. We ended that year full of joy.

You may think we're nuts. For lots of people, giving is counter intuitive. Humanly, we reason, if I give \$1,000 to the church, I will have \$1,000 less. That makes logical sense. But it's not the way God does math. We actually have more when we give money away. Jesus' teachings flip plenty of the world's "common sense" upside down.

The last is first (Matthew 19:30; Mark 10:31).

The servant is the greatest (Matthew 23:11).

When you lose your life, you save it (Matthew 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24; 17:33).

Giving money away makes you richer (2 Corinthians 8:1-3).

What it means to be richer ends up being much more than merely financial and the full blessings are only realized on a much longer timeline.

Many pastors avoid the topic of money because they are scared of your reaction. Among my pastor friends, we all know that the moment we broach money, we'll hear this well-worn

complaint: “All this church cares about is money.” Or its companion: “All this church talks about is money.” Often these complaints come from people who don’t faithfully give to the church. Rarely does a church only care about money, or talk about it more than the Bible does. And if that is happening, it’s unhealthy.

The other reason pastors avoid this topic is because we don’t want to be associated with the gross abuses out there. You’ve seen the stories about some pastor abusing their influence to buy an airplane or build a mansion. That kind of greedy, manipulative behavior drives me crazy and it makes God angry. No godly pastor wants anything to do with it. We did not enter the ministry to get rich.

My heart is to illumine biblical wisdom on generous giving so you can see what God wants you to do in this important arena of your life. I pray that you will be on fire for Jesus and this fire will be expressed in your giving.

Of course, generosity is broader than money, but most people’s sincere questions relate to money. If you’re already feeling tense, ask yourself why. Seriously. Giving is a spiritual issue that relates directly to following Christ, to growing in maturity. Jesus has a lot to say about money and material possessions. Check out the four gospels.

Let’s knock out a few objections that might hinder you from hearing what God has for you.

Is Bruce writing this book to get more money for churches? My heart is not to get something *from* you, but rather to provide something *for* you. My desire is primarily for your spiritual growth, and for Christ’s mission, not to get more money for a church budget or project.

Secondly, does Bruce benefit financially from this book? Sure, I could. And I have committed to give away at least 60 percent of any net profits.

Thirdly, couldn’t you just donate your time instead of your money? It’s good to volunteer and God wants you to do that but giving your time does not count for giving your money. Our money represents our very lives. It’s a way God asks us to worship him.

In this arena of giving, people ask three common questions that I hope to answer. Rather than trying to get cute, I’m just putting them straight out:

- Why should we give money?
- To whom should we give?
- And how much should we give?

These are honest, practical, important questions, for you, and for God.

Week 1 | Why Give?

This week, we are reprinting Chapter 1 of Giving: Three Questions.

Day 1

It's a fair and obvious question. Why in the world should you give away your money?

- It's a limited resource.
- If you give it away, you have less.
- You never know what tomorrow holds. Who knows if you might lose your job or have an expensive medical issue or some other catastrophe?
- Longer-term, you need to worry about retirement.
- Whatever money you are not using today, you need to store away for your later years.
- So it would be best to keep all the money you can.

Frankly, you need your money. And does the church really need it more than you do? You may wonder if your church is using the money responsibly. And if we get a bit more honest with ourselves, there's stuff we want to buy—a house, car, boat, motorcycle, phone, TV, dress or whatever.

Obviously, you can anticipate that I am going to say we should give generously, but why? There are wrong reasons to give:

- We should not give out of fear that God will punish us.
- We should not give to impress other people.
- We should not give to get.

Among all the people reading this book, imagine the wide spread of where people are on this topic. You may have never given to a church. You may have given not more than a few dollars or only sporadically. You may give with incredible generosity. Let's broaden the scope to your generosity in everyday life. Think about your giving to your family, to people in need, to global missions, to people in crisis, all the way to how much you tip people who serve you.

Our children are all generous. One of my sons is among the most generous people I know. He loves to give a tip so big it shocks the server. When we took Tamara out to dinner after her graduation from Texas Women's University, he bought appetizers for the whole table, four of them. After the main course, he bought four orders of sopapillas. Then he insisted on paying for the whole meal for everyone and added a big tip. That's lavish generosity. He loves giving. It brings him so much joy. His joy at Christmas comes from watching family members open the gifts he bought them.

Imagine if you were thrilled to give. Imagine if you were trying to figure out how to give as much as you could. And picture how you would feel if you gave like that. What could drive you to live that way?

Over our morning coffee on a Monday, I asked Tamara, “Why do you give?” By the way, Tamara is really good at giving. She said, “It’s just fun. It brings me so much joy.” She caught herself and said, “I wish my answer was deeper than that. It would sound more spiritual to say to please God or for eternal rewards or something like that,” but she said, “Honestly, I just love to give.” It brings her joy.

And it hit me, that’s it. Giving creates joy. We should give because generosity creates joy. After talking to Tamara, I dove into the Bible to study how God’s Word answers our question, Why give? My study verified Tamara’s simple answer. We give because it creates joy.

Think back to your last Christmas presents. Can you remember the gifts you received? Now ask yourself if you can remember the gifts you gave. For many people it is much easier to remember the gifts you gave because you spent time deciding what to buy, then you went shopping, made the purchase and wrapped the gift and watched the joy on the face of the one you love unwrapping it. Contrast your feelings as you opened your own gifts with your feelings as you watched ones you love opening the gifts you gave them.

While I had fun opening my gifts at Christmas, my greater joy was watching Tamara and my kids and grandkids open their gifts. What a blast to see little 10-month-old Amelia open her Daniel Tiger. And to see two-year-old Arabella thrilled with her multi-colored markers. It was my joy to give Tamara the weekender bag she wanted.

Giving makes us smile. Famous wealthy businessman Andrew Carnegie said, “Millionaires seldom smile.”¹ Hoarding piles of money brings more trouble than it brings joy. It creates more frowns than smiles. Classic Christmas movies make this point—think of *Scrooge* or *The Grinch*.

Giving is contagious. It creates chain reactions of joy. Have you ever been with friends and seen what happens when one person starts laughing really hard, and then another person starts laughing and before you know it, everyone is laughing? It happens with yawns too. More fun is how smiles are contagious. You smile big and the person across from you can hardly stop from smiling. Giving creates smiles. My hope is that your God-inspired generosity creates a wave of smiles, a chain reaction of joy.

Reflect

None of us knows our hearts. Motivations are mysterious and always mixed, never fully pure this side of heaven. Why do we fail to be more generous? What holds us back from giving? One way to gain insight into our question, “Why should we give?” can come from flipping the question into, “Why don’t we give?”

Allow yourself to think deeply about your views on money and material possessions. How are our finances connected to our hearts? Ask God to help you see how our money relates to our relationship with him.

Giving ties to faith, to worship, to love, and contentment, as well as to idolatry, to fear and consuming.

- What is your reaction when someone raises the issue of giving?

Day 2

This week, we are reprinting Chapter 1 of Bruce Miller's book, Giving: Three Questions. We're answering the question, "Why give?"

Generous giving puts a smile on three faces. The first face is the most important. Generosity puts a smile on God's face.

Put a smile on God's face

Giving makes God happy. The Apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 9:7:

*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** (2 Corinthians 9:7).*

When you give, you put a smile on God's face. This may be because God himself is a cheerful giver, so our generosity imitates God and it brings him joy when we follow his model.

When you think about God, who God really is, you want to please him. God is your creator. The triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit is in a category of one. There is none like him. God is incomparable. And the one and only God tells us to give, to live generous lives. He tells us to *excel in this grace of giving* (2 Corinthians 8:7). I want to obey God simply because he is God. God commands us *to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share* (1 Timothy 6:18). Giving puts a smile on God's face because giving obeys God, the creator of everything.

My motivation to give comes not just from who God is, but also from what he has done for us. You give out of gratitude to God. God our Father is the greatest giver who gave the greatest gift. The Bible says,

He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:32).

If you have never trusted in Jesus Christ, that's the most important step you could take. God wants to give you eternal life, forgiveness for all your sins. He offers them to us in Jesus Christ. You receive his gift of salvation by placing faith in Jesus.

In God's Son, Jesus Christ, we have every spiritual blessing. Paul says,

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Ephesians 1:3).

Your generous giving responds to his astoundingly previous generous giving. God has given you far more than you could ever give him.

And more than that, everything you have comes from him. In a sense, you own nothing. Every job, house, car and dollar ultimately comes from God who gives it to you to manage for him during your short stay on earth. You are a steward of his stuff. Like at the end of a Monopoly game, once your life ends, everything goes back in the box. All the properties, houses and hotels you owned, even Boardwalk, go back in the box. You don't take your money and possessions with you into the afterlife. You simply manage them while you are here.

In light of who God is and what God has done for you, you give to worship God. At Christ's birth, the Wise Men, the Magi, laid their generous gifts before baby Jesus. As a grown man, Jesus delighted in the widow who gave her two coins, all she had (Luke 21:1-4). He praised the unnamed woman who poured expensive perfume on his feet (Luke 7:36-50). Generous giving made Jesus smile. It puts a smile on God's face. That's the most important smile.

In one of his parables, Jesus talked about a master who represents God. He praised his servant who managed his resources well. Imagine being the servant and having God say this to you:

Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness! (Matthew 25:21).

I love the thought of sharing in God's happiness. I want to hear him say to me, "Well done good and faithful servant." Generous giving puts that smile on God's face. By your giving, you can share in God's happiness. Giving creates joy, starting with God. The second smile is on others' faces. Generous giving puts a smile on others' faces.

Reflect

- How would you describe God's generosity in what he has given to us?
- How does our giving impact God?

Day 3

This week, we are reprinting Chapter 1 of Bruce Miller's book, Giving: Three Questions. We're answering the question, "Why give?"

Generous giving puts a smile on three faces. Yesterday we saw that the first face is the most important. Generosity puts a smile on God's face. Today we'll consider the second face.

Giving creates joy, starting with God. The second smile is on others' faces. Generous giving puts a smile on others' faces.

Put a smile on others' faces

Giving makes other people happy. It's such a joy to meet a need. When you give to someone in desperate need, you will often see not only a smile, but tears of joy.

One year over the Christmas holiday, a member of Christ Fellowship called asking if there was someone in need who they could anonymously help. What a joy one of our pastors had. You see there was another family in our church with a bunch of young kids who had a really hard year. This pastor had the privilege of delivering a large check to that family. Mom, dad, and their kids were filled with joy—smiles on every face. The prophet Isaiah poetically put it like this,

And if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday (Isaiah 58:10).

If we truly love God, then we will give generously to others in need. The Apostle John said it this way,

If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? (1 John 3:17).

In fact, Proverbs says God will reward us,

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

Giving to the poor is a way of giving to God. I love Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan who took care of a stranger and gave his money to pay for him to be taken care of. Image the smile on the face of that nameless stranger—and on the innkeeper's face who told him his bill was paid (Luke 10:25-37). And the smiles of everyone who heard about it.

In the early church, *they sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need (Acts 2:45)*. So, that the Bible records, *that there were no needy persons among them (Acts 4:34-35)*. I would love to say that there were no needy people in Christ Fellowship because we all gave to anyone who has need.

It's a joy to give to those who are serving in ministry. A while back, Tamara and I got so much joy out of telling one of our Christ Fellowship global workers that we had decided to support them on a monthly basis. They thanked us and thanked us and thanked us. We didn't do it for the thanks. Our joy was to see the smile it put on their faces.

Paul commended the Macedonian Christians because *they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people (2 Corinthians 8:4)*. They were eager

to be involved in the privilege of financially supporting ministry to others. It's a blast to participate in what God is doing. When you get to share in God's work in Uganda, China or in your local community, it's a blast.

When you give to the church, you support all the staff. In speaking of those paid by the church, the Bible says a worker deserves his wages (1 Timothy 5:17–18.) Your giving pays their salaries and provides them with insurance. You put a smile on the face of every staff person.

Listen to how Paul summarizes the joyous impact of generous giving:

This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God [it puts a smile on God's face]. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God [it puts a smile on others' faces] for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you (2 Corinthians 9:12–14).

Generous giving puts a smile on God's face and on others' faces. Then there is one more smile.

We'll read about the final smile tomorrow.

Reflect

- In what ways can your giving bring joy to others?

Day 4

This week, we are reprinting Chapter 1 of Bruce Miller's book, Giving: Three Questions. We're answering the question, "Why give?" Generous giving puts a smile on three faces.

So far we've seen that generous giving puts a smile on God's face and on others' faces. Then there is one more smile.

I was surprised that there seems to be more in the Bible about this smile than about the other two.

It puts a smile on your own face.

Put a smile on your face

Giving makes you smile. The point is not that we give to get. Certainly not. We don't give to get rich. But passage after passage in the Bible teaches that giving brings you blessing. It brings you joy. It makes you smile. Listen to the Word of God as you read a few.

Here's the prophet Malachi:

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it” (Malachi 3:10–12).

It's not that God brings you a little blessing, a dribble. No, he promises to open up the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing you will not have room to store it. Proverbs says,

Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine (Proverbs 3:9–10).

Notice again the abundance—filled to overflowing, brimming over.

This teaching continues in the New Testament. Listen to Jesus in the book of Luke:

Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you (Luke 6:38).

He refers to the ancient grain merchant who would fill the lap of his customer as full as possible until the grain ran over the edge. You can never out give God. The more you give, the more blessing he gives back.

Paul quoted Jesus making the basic point that giving brings joy. In Acts we read,

Remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

Let me paraphrase it. It brings more joy to give money than to receive money. It puts a bigger smile on your face to give than it does to receive. We give because generosity creates joy for God, for others and for us.

The blessings we receive are not only intrinsic to the act of giving itself, but also more blessings come from God when we give. God will enrich us in every way. Speaking of generous giving Paul says,

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.... 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 (2 Corinthians 9:7–11).

These blessings, these “riches,” are much more than financial. Giving grows your soul. Generosity cures greed. Generous giving frees you from the grip of consumerism. It helps you

let loose of this world and live for eternity. It helps you take your eyes off yourself and put your eyes on others. Generous giving builds your faith as you tangibly express that your security is not in your savings but in your Savior.

Randy Alcorn wrote, “Giving is not God’s way of raising money—it’s his way of raising children.”¹ Giving is part of spiritual maturity, part of following Jesus. Jesus said, *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also* (Matthew 6:21). Giving grows your heart.

These blessings are not only here on earth, but also in heaven. They are now and they are eternal. Jesus said,

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal (Matthew 6:19–20).

Paul said that by generous giving, we lay up treasures for the coming age, *so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life* (1 Timothy 6:17–19).

Giving brings you joy today and forever. Our smiles will be even bigger in heaven. It’s been said that you brought nothing into the world and will take nothing out, but a deeper truth is that you can send treasure ahead. Your giving today stores up treasure in heaven. Many people miss this. What you do with your money today impacts eternity.

This saying from Proverbs summarizes the point:

One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed (Proverbs 11:24–25).

Reflect

- In what ways you do experience more blessing when you give contrasted with when you receive?

Day 5

This week, we are reprinting Chapter 1 of Bruce Miller’s book, Giving: Three Questions. We’ve been answering the question, “Why give?” Today, let’s reflect on what we’ve learned and think about how we’ll apply God’s Word to our lives.

¹ Randy Alcorn, *Money, Possessions and Eternity* (Tyndale House, Wheaton, Illinois, 1989), 234.

Reflect

Why give? Giving creates joy. You should give because it puts a smile on three faces: God's, others' and your own. Give generously to create waves of smiles, a chain reaction of joy. What might that look like? Give generously and watch the smile grow on the face of the other person, feel the smile spread across your face and picture God on his throne in heaven smiling as he watches you give.

Let's create a joy chain reaction, a wave of smiles.

1. What holds you back from giving more, more often?
2. In summary, how would you answer the question, why should you give?

Move to Action

- Write out why you will give to God.
 - Go through your records and figure out the current amount you give in an average month. Then calculate what percentage that amount is of your income. (The point is to face the reality of your current giving so you know where you are)
 - If you are married, discuss why you give as a couple. (If you have kids at home, involve them in the conversation.)
-