

George Müller's 7 Fundraising Guidelines Address Today's Excessive Appeals

George Müller took care of 10,024 orphans in his ministry without annoying, aggressive fundraising methods. I'll tell you his approach, but first—is it just me, or have you experienced ongoing uncomfortableness with the approach and amount of some ministry fundraising recently? Multitudes who give generously, recognizing legitimate raising of money, especially during the holiday season, cringe about this and agree we should watch for the two red flags: slick trickery and striving techniques.

What I share bounces right off the wall and comes back to me because 10 years ago a megachurch cut me loose when I spoke out on same-sex “marriage” in an educational video, and the pastor said it was a deal-breaker. So we've been privileged to live the journey of faith for over 10 years, trusting God every month to meet ministry expenses and cover the essentials of life.

Around Thanksgiving, many of us are bombarded by captivating headlines dripping with desperation: “Black Friday opportunity expiring! ... Giving Tuesday... Give Now! Only 12 hours! ... Matching funds offered ... seven-day deadline—respond now! ... Double matching funds ... Three more hours before time expires ... Three times matching funds! ... We haven't heard from you, Larry ... Breaking! Deadline extended ... Angela calling, let me share ... Can we count on you in our hour of need? ... Urgent! We need your pledge ... Almost midnight, Larry, we need to hear from you ... Larry, there's still time to send in your most generous gift ... We can reach our goal—give your very best gift now!”

Marketing Manipulation

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I received a letter with a picture of a “man of God” who asked for a “seed of \$320” based on Ephesians 3:20. This would supposedly bring a “release of prosperity” after I placed my hand upon the enclosed handprint.

Multiply these appeals by 10 or 12 different ministries contacting you regularly, and you can understand how many people are rightfully upset. As we want accountability in the political realm and in the sexual realm among ministries, so should we tap the brakes here. The example is not good for younger ministries, plus, let’s ask: Are we really trusting God or the arm of the flesh (Jer. 17:5)?

Chuck Smith, founder of Calvary Chapel Church network, warned us: “If we strive to attain something then we’ll strive to maintain something.” Bigger is not always better. “God’s goals” may actually be ours (more staff, television ministry, podcast expansion, billboards, soon to face God’s pruning).

The World Is Watching

“What we do speaks so loud they can’t hear what we say.”

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When new leadership was put in place for one of America’s top Christian networks, they discovered the primary negative people had concerning the station was its fundraising techniques. They changed and found incredible financial and viewership success.

Can you relate to these embarrassing experiences where I pondered what non-Christians were thinking?

- At a healing service with sick people, the minister took the first hour for a spontaneous fundraising effort characterized by pressure and shameless appeals to meet ministry goals.
- After months of relationship building with a sharp student, he consented to join me for a Sunday evening service. The pastor started with, “God wants me to shift the service and instead raise \$10,000 to pay for a piano on loan that could be purchased if we all give.” Repeatedly counting the money and coming up short, he kept pushing. I apologized for what my friend endured for one excruciating hour.
- Remember: “Man looks on the outward appearance” (1 Sam. 16:7c, ESV). Recent headlines exposed a North Carolina pastor whose divorce agreement revealed his 14,000 square-foot, \$2.3 million home (with theater, gym, pool and 58 acres) plus his wife’s \$1.3 million alimony agreement of \$12,000 monthly for nine years.

“God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you” (Rom. 2:24a, NIV). Paul wrote the Corinthian church regarding finances: “We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men” (2 Cor. 8:20-21).

Jim Bakker’s Story

Years ago, Jim Bakker, upon release from prison for unrighteous fundraising tactics, humbly wrote his story in the book “I Was Wrong.” Hear the heart of a brother who was transformed by God’s redemptive grace:

As the true impact of Jesus’ words regarding money impacted my heart and mind, I became physically nauseated. I was wrong. I was wrong! Wrong in my life style, certainly, but even more fundamentally wrong in my understanding of the Bible’s true message. Not only was I wrong, but I was

teaching the opposite of what Jesus had said.

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Müller's 7 Guidelines

George Müller established orphanages in England in the 1800s to provide for thousands of needy children. I visited these former orphanages and pondered how God faithfully supplied without manipulation, although Müller did tell people what he was doing.

I respect those who have a preference of never making specific needs known, but believe there is biblical support for doing so (Paul did with the Philippians and Corinthians) as long as it is helpful information, not clever manipulation.

1. Needs should be revealed to God in prayer.
2. Debt should not be incurred.
3. Money contributed for a specific purpose should never be used for any other purpose.
4. All accounts should be audited annually.
5. No ego-pandering by publication of donor's names with the amount of their gifts; each donor should be thanked privately.
6. No names of prominent persons should be sought for the board or to advertise the institution.
7. The success of the institution should not be measured by the number served or by the amount of money taken in, but by God's blessing on the work, which is expected to be in proportion to the time spent in prayer.

Giving Begins in the Local Church

According to the Bible, each Christian should be added to a local church (Acts 2:41-42) and financially support that storehouse with the first fruits of their income or tithe with the New Testament focus on generosity.

Additional giving is encouraged as free will offerings to worthy ministries and trustworthy individuals. The Malachi 3:8-12 covenantal blessings are real, encompassing both tithes and offerings.

7 Questions Worth Asking

1. Do leaders model Christ-likeness and servanthood or salesmanship and self-promotion?
2. Is Jesus exalted or are man and ministries? (Note: It is legitimate to use the minister's name, such as with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.)
3. Do you feel an opportunity to hear from God or a pressurized plea to respond urgently to man?
4. Do you sense a sincere, faith-building presentation or misleading promises and fear-inducing suggestions?
5. Does the ministry have a track record of God-honoring, spiritual fruit or unsubstantiated claims and exaggerated reports?
6. Is there financial accountability or false assurances?
7. Do you sense an inner witness or a clear Holy Spirit-check?

Early church father John Chrysostom reminds unscrupulous leaders today: "You have taken possession of the resources that belong to Christ and you consume them aimlessly. Don't you realize that you are going to be held accountable?"

Here's the Deal: Hudson Taylor, China's pioneer missionary, encourages us: "God's work, done in God's way, will never lack

God's supply."

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