

Spotting and Stopping Shameless Holiday Financial Appeals

“Oh, the weather outside is frightful, but the fire inside’s delightful ...”

This past week, Christmas carols officially began in many stores and malls. Bypassing Thanksgiving, retailers are eager to get more shoppers and spenders this holiday season.

In the same spirit of capitalizing on getting something this season, a spokesperson for the “Million Student March” appeared on Neil Cavuto’s program declaring their “demands”: Free college tuition; forgiving all college loans; and, \$15 minimum wage for all campus workers. After last week’s Missouri “achievement” of getting rid of the college president and chancellor, the sky’s the limit!

With Thanksgiving and Christmas coming, it’s natural to think about giving. Multitudes of churches and ministries wisely seize the moment. “It’s the most wonderful time of the year ...” so it’s an opportune time to encourage people to be generous with end-of-year giving.

I include myself in this group asking people to remember me with their financial gifts. Losing financial backing from my church as I addressed hot button topics in the culture, I now have the wonderful opportunity to truly live by faith, trusting God for our provision through financial partners and friends.

Amid the legitimate appeals, unfortunately there are some that operate in ways grievous to God. Even as our president shamelessly adorns the cover of the leading LGBTQ magazine, *OUT*, as their “Ally of the Year,” some ministers shamelessly

put out questionable appeals as they seek allies in financial support.

I just received a letter with a picture of a “man of God” who told me “my hands are burning as I type this letter, Larry” (my name was used 12 times in the letter) asking me for a “seed of \$320” based on Eph. 3:20. “God told me that I was to send to them the necktie that I had when supernatural miracle favor was poured out upon me with extreme power.” This would bring a “release of money and prosperity” after I placed my hand upon the handprint on the page.

This is not only ridiculous and embarrassing, it is downright dishonest.

It's time to demote marketing ministers and slick sales evangelists who offer their “prosperity bracelets,” “prayer bears” and other silly trinkets. What's next, “action figures” and bobble head dolls of these prominent promoters?

Paul wrote the Corinthian church regarding finances: “We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administered 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).

It's imperative that we spot and stop pressurized, deceptive, gimmicky practices that hurt the cause of Christ – especially as we try to reach unbelievers (many of whom already believe all we talk about is money, money, money). “As it is written, ‘The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you’” (Rom. 2:24).

3 Guidelines for Fundraising

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 man who today has been 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.”

May we benefit from Jim’s painful lesson and develop discernment while cultivating a generous spirit in our lives. Remember Jesus told us, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth ...” (Matt. 6:19), and it can be gone ever so quickly.

I was saddened recently in reading that singing icon Johnny Mathis, now 80, lost his Hollywood Hills mansion, valuable art collection and lifetime awards in an inferno that destroyed them. Imagine living in a home for 56 years and watching it go up in smoke in a moment of time. Let’s remember him in our prayers.

In the meantime, here are three areas to consider:

1. Giving begins in the local church.

According to the Bible, each Christian should be “added” to an authentic New Testament church (Acts 2:41-42) and financially support that church family with the “first fruits” of their income or tithe.

Additional giving is encouraged as “free will offerings” even as today we give to worthy ministries and trustworthy individuals in the body of Christ. The Malachi 3:8-12 covenantal blessings are real, encompassing both tithes and offerings. Let’s believe them as we prayerfully give offerings toward worthwhile ministries advancing God’s kingdom today.

2. Churches and ministries should honor responsible fundraising guidelines.

The godfather of modern fundraising is George Muller. In the 1800s he established orphanages in England to provide for thousands of needy children. I visited these former orphanages and pondered how God faithfully supplied without any inappropriate sales techniques or high-pressure manipulation.

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

When Jesus said to give not letting your left hand know what the right hand is doing (Matt. 6:3), he was addressing motive not method.

Muller's 7 guidelines:

- Funds shouldn't be solicited and needs should be revealed to God in prayer [personal preference not a biblical mandate].
- Debt should not be incurred.
- Money contributed for a specific purpose should never be used for any other purpose.
- All accounts should be audited annually by professional auditors.
- No ego-pandering by publication of donor's names with the amount of their gifts; each donor should be thanked privately.
- No "names" of prominent or titled persons should be sought for the board or to advertise the institution.
- The success of the institution should not be measured by the number served or by the amounts 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.

3. 7 Questions to ask concerning financial requests:

- Do leaders model Christ-likeness and servanthood or salesmanship and self-promotion?
- Is Jesus exalted or is man and ministries? [Note: It is legitimate to have the minister's name used, like the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.]
- Do you feel an opportunity to hear from God or a pressurized plea to respond urgently to man "as time is running out!"?
- Do you sense a sincere, faith-building presentation or misleading promises and fear-inducing suggestions?
- Does the ministry have a track record of God-honoring, spiritual fruit or unsubstantiated claims and exaggerated reports?
- Is there financial accountability or false assurances?
- Do you sense an inner witness or a clear Holy Spirit check?

John Chrysostom, early church father, 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?"

Likewise, Hudson Taylor, China's pioneer missionary encourages us: "God's work, done in God's way, will never lack God's supply."

Happy and blessed holiday season as we offer thanksgiving and celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus!