

Five Things They Never Told Me About Christian Fundraising

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What's so *Christian* about the way we do our fundraising? Is Christian fundraising nothing more than secular fundraising with some Bible verses strewn throughout our appeal letters? I have been wrestling with these questions over my career wanting to understand what our Christian theology has to do with our fundraising strategies and techniques. As a result, I discovered five things that I believe mark us as distinctly Christian fundraisers, and change dramatically the way we carry out our work. Things I wish I had learned a lot earlier.

Spirit-led not Sales-led

God's people give to God's work as they are led by the Spirit of God. We may agree with this in our hearts but approach our work as though it is really all up to us. When we ask people to pray over their decision, we must be sincere in leaving the decision in God's hands. We must do our work well by making clear presentations and a definite ask for support. But we do not 'close the sale.' One dear, faithful supporter responded to an ask I had made by saying to me, "I will pray about this and trust God to lead me in how I should respond." Then she looked intently at me and continued, "Will *you*?" It is a question I ask myself now on every donor call.

Transformational not Transactional

If we ask our donors to make a transactional giving decision, we will fail both our ministry and the kingdom of God. Asking supporters to give their money is different from asking them to give their heart. Our goal is not just more money, it is to raise up godly stewards to be rich toward God. Transactional gifts are here and gone. A relationship with supporters that leads to ongoing spiritual transformation (in them and us) builds the kingdom of God, including our ministry. Christian fundraising is a function of God's work of transforming hearts, minds and purses. The secret that is lost on so many CEO's and Boards is this; if you take the time to participate in the transforming work that God is doing in the lives of your supporters, their generosity will follow. The very best givers are the most faithful followers of Jesus Christ.

Warfare not Welfare

When we ask people to be faithful stewards by supporting our ministry, we are entering into spiritual warfare. Christian fundraising is about far more than asking people to give to the welfare of our ministries. It is challenging God's people to deny their allegiance to the god of Mammon and declare through their generosity their complete obedience to one Lord. The enemy will not take this lying down, so we need to be prepared for the battle. I have been blessed by reading Ephesians 6:10-18 as a preparation for my fundraising work. It calls us to put on the full armor of God, to stand firm and pray in the Spirit. A fundraiser is a warrior, not a welfare collector. Our work is symbolized not by an extended empty hand, but by a helmet, sword and shield.

Ministry not Means

Christian fundraising is not a means to an end, it is an end in itself. Done faithfully, it calls people to greater obedience as godly stewards. It gives people the opportunity to express their allegiance to one Lord, breaks the hold of materialism in their lives, brings blessings, invites celebration and engenders true joy. In these ways, Christian development work is ministry. "I am spending so much time fundraising I can't do ministry." That is a common and deeply flawed conception. If we believe our development work is simply a means (necessary evil?) we must use in order to fund ministry, we are tragically mistaken. When our fundraising becomes valued as part of our mission and ministry, we approach our supporters differently, we assess our success differently, we hire development staff differently and we celebrate differently. And when our entire organization understands that development work is ministry, too, will be transformed.

It Starts With Me

I cannot ask others to respond as faithful, godly stewards if I am not a faithful, godly steward. I cannot lead a development team with integrity if my own life does not bear witness to a life that is rich toward God. In one church campaign, a pastor listed all pledges given to the campaign from largest to smallest, and all were anonymous except his own. His intention was to demonstrate leadership by example. Our people (and the world) are watching to see how God is transforming us as leaders. The first step in the transformation

of our organization is our own, personal transformation. And the first step in becoming an effective fundraiser is becoming a generous, cheerful giver.

Looking back I see how much my work as a leader and as a fundraiser has been affected by these convictions. I believe that there is something wonderfully unique about *Christian* fundraising and that realization has engendered a sense of joy and satisfaction in my work. I pray it will for yours as well.