

Staff Work

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Why Give?

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Why Give?

Abstract

"God has wired us to recognize particular people in need and to want to give of ourselves in response."

Posting about the Christian's response to needs from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

[http://inallthings.org/why-give/?](http://inallthings.org/why-give/)

Keywords

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Disciplines

Christianity

Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

Why Give?

 [inallthings.org/why-give/](https://allthings.org/why-give/)

John Baas

Joy

My wife and I sometimes agree to NOT give each other gifts for birthdays or the Hallmark holidays. I think our reasoning has been sound — after all, we try to demonstrate our love for each other every day; the family budget is pressed by household expenses, car repairs, medical bills, and the cost of raising children; retirement is not that far away, and the reasons continue.

How successful are we at honoring that agreement? Not at all! Giving to someone you love brings such joy that it is really hard to refrain from doing it.

Isn't that the way God made us?! Despite our society's constant consumerist drumbeat message that we can't be happy until we get a better car, home appliance, dining experience, or cell phone plan, haven't we all experienced the greater anticipation and joy of seeing our loved ones receive what we've given them than in unwrapping our own packages?

O. Henry's 1905 short story "[The Gift of the Magi](#)" illustrated this so poignantly that it has been retold and adapted countless times over the last century in plays, musicals, film, and even by cartoon characters from Mickey Mouse to the Muppets.

Even though our selfishness often competes against it, the joy experienced with giving that flows from love is common to the human condition.

Need

One of the privileges of my work has been to meet many people who have recognized and responded to a neighbor's need.

I've seen a couple "adopt" a single mother and her child and help provide food, clothing, job transportation, and advocacy.

I've seen a family in California open their home (and their cupboards) to victims of the recent wildfires.

I've seen congregations sponsor immigrant families to help them start new lives in the US.

In today's information age, the answer to the question "who is my neighbor" doesn't stop next door or even within our local community.

As it is with love, God has wired us to recognize particular people in need and to want to give of ourselves in response.

Impact

When we see brokenness in our world and think deeply about its causes, we may feel called to give to institutions that address that brokenness.

Are your passions ignited by fighting homelessness? Finding new and effective medical treatments?

Responding to natural disasters? Feeding the hungry? Providing education?

Giving to institutions that attempt to deal with root causes and that multiply our small gifts to make large and lasting impacts allows us all to participate in the solutions.

Redemption

Love, addressing an urgent need, and impacting a broken world may all be significant parts of a Christian's motivation to give, but they are not unique to Christians. Secularists and followers of many other faiths find these motivations at the root of their giving. But Christians who claim a Reformed world and life view have another great reason to give.

Christ is redeeming the whole creation and he has invited us to participate in his redemptive work.

Here is an analogy that is undoubtedly inadequate, but it is current:

I'm a lifelong fan of the Chicago Cubs. For any readers unfamiliar with American professional baseball, the Cubs last participated in the World Series in 1945. They lost. The Cubs last won the World Series in 1908. I'm not old enough to remember either of those events, but I am old enough to have accumulated a lot of scar tissue over the past several decades.

The Cubs are having a good season this year. They are going to the postseason. Imagine what it would mean for their fans if they got into the World Series. Imagine what it would be like if they won!

If the Cubs play in the World Series, I will do all I can to arrange my schedule so that I can watch the games on television because I want to see it, not just hear about it. Tickets to the World Series are hard to come by but, given the opportunity, being at the ballpark to see it in person would be even more thrilling. If the Cubs would win, the celebration would be almost unimaginable.

Now imagine being a player on the first Cubs team to win a championship in over a century...

In the ultimate cosmic contest, we already know the outcome. Christ wins! The championship trophy already has his name on it. But the contest is still being played out, and Christ has offered us the opportunity to be part of the team. Not just watching from afar. Not just a spectator in the stadium. On the field — in uniform!

As Christ redeems this world from the effects of sin, our giving is one important way we can participate in and contribute to his redemptive work. And similarly to a winning team which is much greater than the sum of the contributions of its individual players, God multiplies our gifts in ways beyond our human capability to predict or understand.

Back to "The Gift of the Magi". O. Henry concludes the story this way:

"The magi, as you know, were wise men – wonderfully wise men – who brought gifts to the Babe in the manger. They invented the art of giving Christmas presents. Being wise, their gifts were no doubt wise ones, possibly bearing the privilege of exchange in case of duplication. And here I have lamely related to you the uneventful chronicle of two foolish children in a flat who most unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house. But in a last word to the wise of these days let it be said that of all who give gifts these two were the wisest. Of all who give and receive gifts, such as they are wisest. Everywhere they are wisest. They are the magi."

I pray that God will teach me, and all of us, to be as extravagantly foolish in our giving. Try to imagine what he would do with that. Try to imagine the joy. Try to imagine the celebration.