



CROSS CURRENTS

Greetings from the President of Kirby-Smith Associates



A time of peace, a time of hope, a time of love, a time to share our many blessings . . .

Christmas is all these things and so much more. As we celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, may we be ever mindful of our gifts and thankful to share with those we love and to those in need.

A very Merry Christmas to you and your families!

C. Eugene Musser

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You Are Gifted!



from Kirby-Smith Associates, Inc.

Have you ever asked a group of young teenagers the question, "What are your gifts?" or "How are you, as a person, gifted?" Most find it very difficult to answer.

Part of the maturing process of every Christian involves being able to answer the question, "How am I gifted by the Lord?" God's revelation in the Bible tells us, in the clearest possible terms, that we are gifted. "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:7). "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God" (1 Corinthians 2:12).

Saint Paul reminded the Christians of Rome, "We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us" (Romans 12:6). So, let us exercise them.

The world says that if we believe in ourselves, we can accomplish whatever we set out to do. The world tells us that our human potential is unlimited. This message is often accompanied by stories of people who have gotten wealthy or have become famous.

The Christian approach is best summed up in the prayer Jesus taught us to pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your Kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:9, 10, 11). In other words, the first purpose of our life is to give glory to God, and to do God's will by the strength given to us.

There is no hint of self sufficiency in Jesus' words; but there is a promise of the sufficiency of God's help in doing God's work. "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who ask, receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will

be opened" (Matthew 7:7, 8). Imagine the wonder of these promises! When we discern God's will, God's strength will never fail us!

How do we take this message into our hearts and build our lives upon it? Can it be as simple as it sounds?

There are two movements in the life of faith by which a fear of inadequacy is banished from our life. Each of these movements plays an important part in our full conversion to Christ. These two movements do not follow strictly, one after the other, but they are intertwined in any Christian life according to God's unique plan for each person.

The first movement involves believing God's Word about who and what we are. The first book of the Scriptures states the basic truth: "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27).

To the early Christians, Saint Paul wrote, "and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:23, 24).

The Holy Spirit works within us to move us to believe that we are indeed created in God's image. This means that, deep down, we are good and gifted. A teenager wrote, upon hearing the Word of God for the first time, "I'm loveable. God don't make junk!" Walking by faith, not by feelings, gives us a sense of being on thin ice, but actually we are on the solid rock of God's Word. We can place our focus on what is good and allow others to reflect our goodness back to us—even believe sincere compliments. We need no longer believe that if we do something well, we're lucky; if we mess up, our true self has shown itself. Not so. We are created in God's image, a little less than an angel!

In accepting the beautiful truth of our faith about ourselves, the support of Christian friends or a healing faith community is most helpful.

A second growth in our spiritual life is indicated, by Saint Paul, in a letter to the Corinthians. Paul tells us that he was praying, intensely, that a particular affliction might be removed from him. No doubt, he figured that he could serve God much better without this affliction. Three times he begged the Lord to be delivered. Instead, the Lord revealed an important truth to him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Paul went on to say, "Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

Asking People to Give in a Difficult Economy



by Jeff Knauer, Executive Vice President

It's the season for giving. God so loved that He gave. Christmas shopping is in full swing. How about a Christmas offering for the church? Many churches depend upon seasonal generosity to underwrite ministry or complete a project. During a difficult economic time, however, many church leaders debate whether an "ask" should be made.

There is no doubt that unemployment has touched most communities and congregations. There are those who are struggling to keep their homes. Yet the spirit of giving lives on. Failing to provide an opportunity for people to contribute "robs" them of a way to share in helping others.

While serving as a pastor for 22 years, I found some ways of asking that were more successful than others. Let me list a few ideas that succeeded.

1. Be specific about the purpose for the "ask." Instead of requesting the "usual" Christmas offering, let parishioners know how the money will be used. People are more apt to contribute when they understand the purpose for their giving.
2. Try to put a "face" on the request. Who will this offering help or benefit? If the money will be used to assist families in need, say so (though specific names are usually best kept private). If the money is for a specific ministry, briefly explain who will be blessed. If for the facility, who will benefit? People give most generously when they can assist other people.
3. Let the congregation know the results of their giving will be reported. Set a timely date to give this report. The reported results will confirm that the money was used for its intended purpose. This

practice will affirm giving and strengthen trust in leadership. It will also allow the congregation to experience the joy of a "mission accomplished."

4. Enlist the prayer support of all members to petition God that the need will be met. Even those who may not be able to give financially can pray. Share the results of these prayers with the same enthusiasm as the monetary gifts. This way everyone may share in reaching the goal.

It is tempting to refrain from confronting parishioners with yet another "ask" at the time of year so many other worthwhile charities are doing the same. Yet, this IS the season for giving. The church and its mission should be leading the way.

The Power of Vision



by Dennis R. Emrick, M. Div., Vice President

A church with an average attendance under 40, struggling to pay its bills, raises \$2,800 in two weeks to send to victims of a Tsunami . . .

A medium-size church that normally cannot balance its books until after Christmas raises significant funds to provide for local fire victims . . .

A growing congregation that makes a commitment to give 20% of its income to mission finds there is no shortfall of funds to pay its own bills . . .

What do these churches have in common? Vision! More specifically, they share a vision that captures the passion of people to make a difference or help others change their lives. George Barna in his 1997 book *How to Increase Giving in Your Church* identified several reasons people give to the church. At the top of his list were (1) donors look for an organization in which they have a "heart connection" and (2) they give to churches which are financially efficient in doing ministry. David Bell, Senior Partner and Stewardship Consultant of the Design Group International has discovered in his studies that the top two reasons church members give is (1) they have a connection or believe in the mission of the church, and (2) they give because they believe people's lives are being changed through their donation.

Here at Kirby-Smith Associates, we can confirm those findings. Consistently, those churches that see beyond their capital project to the people who will be affected by the project raise more money toward their ministry.

A capital campaign is designed to raise new money to build a building or payoff a debt. At least that is the stated purpose. The reality is, however, that there is no need for the building without the ministry that will be housed in it. A campaign to raise money for a new sanctuary is not ultimately about the sanctuary, but about the ability of the church to provide an atmosphere in which God's people can be enriched and renewed in their faith. And, it helps them worship a God who is bigger than themselves. It is a place for change and renewal. It will be a place where new families are launched in weddings, where the faith of new Christians is nurtured and matures, and where the hope of the resurrection and life to come transforms grief into hope.

A family life center is not about building a gym. It is really about reaching children, youth, and adults and transforming their lives into productive, committed Christians who are in fact the "leaven" in the world. It's a place where youth can work through the application of their faith in life situations. It's a place where parents can find new meaning in handling their money and remove a stressful block in their relationship.

A strong vision captivates the imagination and passion of people. Strong vision provides the motivation for one to sacrifice—set something aside for God!

Scripture is pretty clear— "Without a vision the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18). Without a vision, the church neither grows nor raises money to support the mission by which it will grow!

Services offered by Kirby-Smith Associates, Inc.

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- Christian School Campaigns
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