



Math: Math and Giving

What if a math lesson helped students to think about giving?

Alison was unhappy with her middle school math unit on money, since most of the examples focused on making or gaining money. She got together with the economics teacher to create something different.

"I decided to restructure my introductory lesson and use a game to get the students to think about money. In this game, the roll of dice determines how much money they gain, spend, and give away. I put the students in groups and gave them game boards with three columns (see the PDF for boards and playing instructions). The game boards were labeled "Getting Money," "Giving Money," and "Spending Money." All students started with \$10. In the first round they gained various amounts of money; in the second round they spent money; in the third round they gave money away. Students kept a record as the game progressed. Some found they didn't have any money left to give away by the third round, while others had plenty. The groups discussed what happened with each round.

- Which plays left you with the most money?
- Which plays left you with the least amount of money?
- Work out three plays that would leave you with less than \$5.

"Several combinations of plays left students with too little money to give away; this led to a discussion about whether it is possible to spend a day out with friends and still have some money left to give. What could they do differently to make this happen? Students played the second version of the game, where giving is in the second round. This time, students had enough money to give away in round two, but didn't always have enough money to spend on themselves in round three. We compared the results from the two games and what difference changing the order made."

What's going on here?

Alison saw her maths lesson as a way of stimulating her students to think about giving and how they use money.

She engaged students in adopting a new framework by engaging in a game that prompted reflection on getting and giving, and by giving students two contrasting experiences to reflect upon (the two forms of the game).

She reshaped her practice by designing a game that raised the right questions and making space for a discussion about priorities and what difference they make.

What does this have to do with faith, hope, and love?

Giving is a strong motif in the Bible. God gave the world to humanity out of love, and he provides an abundant world. In response, God calls for generosity. Giving to the poor and needy is accepted as done to Christ (Matthew 25:37-40). Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Any riches we have should be gained honestly and justly and should be shared. With wealth comes a responsibility for others (Deuteronomy 16:17). Giving money away to help other people is a concrete way to demonstrate love for our neighbor and caring for others in our local or global community. In many cases, churches and aid agencies bring hope for the future to those they support. By intentionally, informedly, and regularly giving away money, people can express their faith and values.

What difference does it make?

Most teaching about addition and subtraction of money centers around buying and spending, or, occasionally, around saving to gain interest on saved money. Alison helped her students see the consequences of giving away money, encouraging them to rethink giving from pledging a few dollars for a walk-a-thon to something that is part of life and needs to be budgeted for.

Where could we go from here?

This game can be adapted to various levels. The simplest version of this game focuses on basic addition and subtraction of money. It can be made more difficult by using different amounts of money or by using percentages rather than amounts of money. It can be played using mental arithmetic or using pens and papers. Teachers decide whether to allow calculators. More generally, simulations that allow students to try out more than one scenario in relation to important choices can help moral and spiritual reflection.

Digging deeper

The Bible describes God as a giving God. He loved the world so much he gave his only Son ([John 3:16](#)); he provides for people and is called the Provider. Giving is in response to God's giving to humanity. Giving and receiving are essential parts of Christian community life, not something that happens occasionally or reluctantly ([2 Corinthians 9:5-15](#)). The possession of gifts and material wealth carries responsibility: they are for serving the common good. Money is not bad, but we should not serve it ([1 Timothy 6:10](#)). The attitude of the Bible is summed up in Luke's gospel: we are not defined by what we own ([Luke 12:15](#)).

Make all you can, save all you can, give all you can. John Wesley

Giving a minimum of one-tenth was practiced in the Old Testament ([Leviticus 27:30-32](#)). Some Christians follow this practice today. Others give what they can depending on circumstances, bearing in mind the Bible's teaching about generosity and care for the poor ([2 Corinthians 8:10-12](#)).

Our society looks for freedom and happiness in wealth, fame, and power. The Bible sees it in giving and serving others. Jesus taught that people ultimately give account to God for what they do, including what they do with their money ([Matthew 16:27](#)).

All the blessings we enjoy are divine deposits, committed to our trust on this condition, that they should be dispensed for the benefit of our neighbors. John Calvin



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