

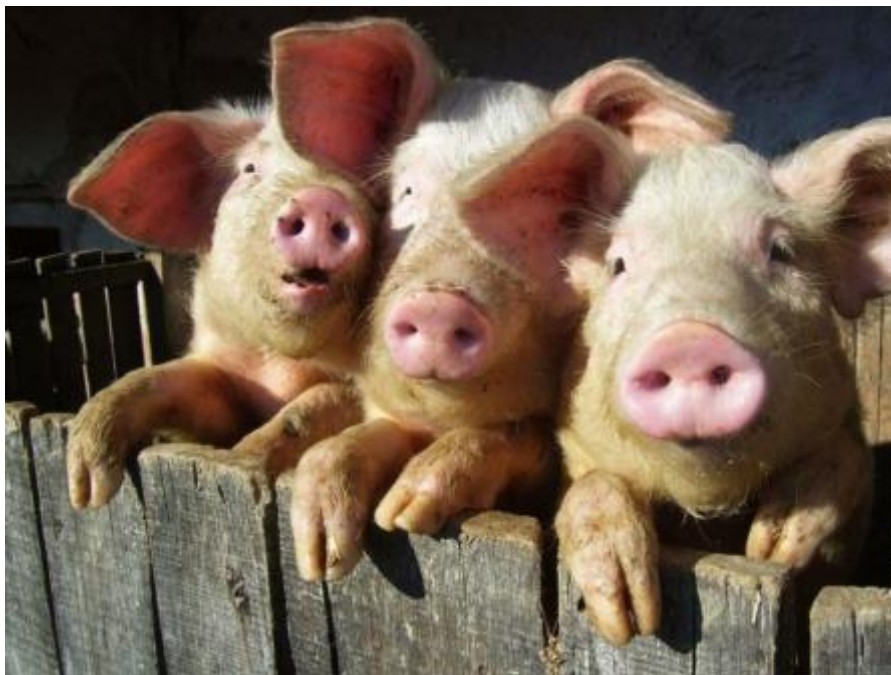


The Generous Giving Project

The Three Little Pigs

Rachael Phillips

Once upon a time there were three little pigs. They decided to set out on their own and leave their mother pig to find their fortunes. They had always enjoyed sports at school so each decided to set up a gym. The first little pig built a gym in the town centre and invited lots of woodland animals to use it. They did and he was very happy. But this little pig was so embarrassed about talking about money that he never charged his members. They used all his facilities and attended his step classes and got healthier and fitter and they never paid a penny.



Within months of opening, the first little pig was in financial ruin and he couldn't keep the wolf from the door. One day he saw a debt collector van outside his gym. It said Wolf Collections and his heart sank because he'd read fairy tales as a piglet, and he knew he was the first pig. Luckily Mr Wolf, of Wolf Collections, had attended "Mission England" at Roker Park in 1984 and found faith in God. He was now a committed and practising Christian and had really changed his ways. He paid off the outstanding debt on the rented premises, shut the gym and took the little pig back to his home, giving him some sound financial advice on the way. The little pig felt ashamed

but Mr Wolf told him not to worry, and he'd always look out for him. The little pig slept in the spare room of Mr Wolf's flat.

The second little pig set up a gym on an industrial estate. He always thought of himself as the smartest pig so he charged £200 a month for membership. Unfortunately the creatures living in this area were really poor and couldn't afford to pay the membership fee. They thought the gym looked great and they really wanted to be part of it, but it was just too exclusive, too expensive. Within weeks the pig was in financial ruin and he didn't know how he'd keep the wolf from the door. Letters from the bank were left unopened because this little pig hated thinking about debt.

Soon enough he saw the debt collector van outside his gym. He'd also read fairy tales as a piglet and thought nothing could save his bacon. Luckily Mr Wolf of Wolf Collections explained to the second little pig that he only wanted to help. He opened up the letters with the pig and helped him pay off the debt. The second little pig felt so bitterly sorry for his greediness. Mr Wolf patted his pink shoulder and said, 'There, there. Don't worry. I'll always be here to help,' and the little pig moved into Mr Wolf's flat just like his brother.

The third little pig was a sensible pig. He wasn't foolish or greedy. He thought long and hard about opening his gym. He really wanted it to bring the community together so he gathered all his friends and prospective members. He held a meeting in the old school hall that he planned to rent for his gym. He told the crowd about all the weekly classes he planned to run, the personal training he would offer, the healthier lifestyle and all the other benefits of being part of his gym.

Because he wanted to avoid the mistake of his youngest brother, he decided to be upfront about money. It made him really uncomfortable but he felt it was sensible and right. He told them that whilst he wouldn't charge for membership and there would be no huge joining fee, like at his middle brother's gym, he did expect his friends to contribute to the running of the gym. Some of the poorer creatures looked at their hooves in embarrassment. 'Don't worry,' he said, 'Just give what you can.' They loved his gym and his whole ethos and they could see the benefits of being part of it. They were generous in their giving.

Some of the other creatures had plenty of cash and were a bit embarrassed about handing it over publicly as it looked a bit crude. They stared at their paws in embarrassment. The little pig said they could easily set up a standing order through their bank and that everyone was free to pay as much or little as they were able, and that it was all gratefully received, as after all, the only way the gym could stay open was if all its members gave what they could. The animals liked this very much, and no matter what their species, whether they were big or small or herbivores or carnivores, they were ALL welcome to train at the third pig's gym. They didn't have to train on their own anymore, they could do it together or even join in classes on an evening.

When Mr Wolf heard about it, he paid the third little pig a visit. The pig was shaking from his snout to his tail when he saw Mr Wolf as he'd read his fairy stories, but couldn't quite remember what happened to the third little pig. Luckily, before he fainted in terror, the first and second little pig jumped out of the van to congratulate their kind and sensible brother. Mr Wolf offered to run a spin class free of charge at the gym, and he suggested that the younger brothers ought to help with refreshments and cleaning up. The gym went from strength to strength because all the animals felt part of it and gave generously to its running costs. The third little pig even won a special award for business enterprise and they lived happily ever after. The end.

From the author: Some people might find the third pig's story a little unrealistic but, then, so much of what we believe and teach as Christians is unrealistic. So much of what Jesus taught was unrealistic. Funnily enough, though, whenever people have taken Jesus' teaching seriously, amazing things have happened. I guess the question we have to ask is whether the third pig's story looks like the kind of unrealistic thing Jesus talked about. In this story we probably all see ourselves and our churches reflected in some way in all three pigs and deep down we probably want to be the third pig. We don't all know a Mr Wolf who can pay off our debt but we do know Jesus who can do rather a lot more than that.