The Stewardship JOURNAL

From the Desk of
Our Executive Director

Missionary Musings

Building Systems and Stories

Your Story and The
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MISSOURI BAPTISTS

THE STEWARDSHIP JOURNAL

From the desk of our Executive Director

Welcome to our second issue of ***The Stewardship Journal.*** It's not an accident that we chose stewardship for our name instead of the more currently popular term, generosity. I'll have more about that in this issue of the Journal as we introduce a monthly post called **Missionary Musings by Dr. John L. Yeats**. Here is a quote from that post:

> "It might surprise some folks, but generosity isn't the goal of the Christian life. Our goal is to be good stewards of what God entrusts to us. Good stewardship begets generosity, not the other way around. Generosity is a by-product of stewardship."

One of our goals for ***The Stewardship Journal*** is to help you build a stewardship platform that increases generosity.

In addition to my lead post, let me give you a preview of the pages that follow.

Mark Brooks, The Stewardship Coach, his post, **"Building Systems and Stories"** with this quote from Dave Anderson, **"Church attendance is not decreasing, it's decentralizing."** Like it or not we are experiencing this. Mark gives practical advice on how your church can meet the challenges this has and will continue to present MBC churches.

Bonus Section – This week the bonus material lays the foundation for how to tell your vision and story. It's called, "**Your Story and The Connecting Power of Vision."** This post is another example of the type of practical help and tools we have planned for you.

Offering Talks – We continue giving you a weekly "talk," helping make the connection of how a gift given at your church touches the world and indeed eternity. We believe that by elevating the importance of the offering each week you'll see giving increase.

I am very excited about the material in this issue *and* the topics I know are coming up. You are going to be reading great thoughts from leaders here in our state as well as others. We would love to hear your thoughts and ideas.

Advancing the Gospel!

Dr. John Yeats

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Missionary Musings

Dr. John L. Yeats

Stewardship. Have you noticed how that word seems to have fallen into disrepute among some? The new buzz word everyone uses now is "generosity." I have no problem with generosity. I applaud generosity. But lost people can be generous. And, how do you define generosity? If you give a penny once, does that make you generous?

It might surprise some folks, but generosity isn't the goal of the Christian life. Our goal is to be good stewards of what God entrusts to us. Good stewardship begets generosity, not the other way around. Generosity is a by-product of stewardship.

How is it that the cool new word is "generosity," not the biblical word "stewardship?" I hear a lot of explanations given. Some say the word "generosity" is easier for "guests" to understand. Using that logic, let's rename baptisms "dunkings." You would have good biblical standing inserting that word for baptism. You can't say the same for generosity replacing stewardship.

Frankly, I feel that the "guest" mentality directing many churches has driven the re-shaping of biblical stewardship. The movement to downplay giving started in the late twentieth century, led primarily by churches like Willow Creek and other seeker-attractional churches. Following their lead, many churches stopped having an offering time as an act of obedient worship. Sadly, to attract people, any teaching on biblical stewardship was absent.

Decades later, what do we have to show for our de-emphasis of biblical stewardship? Dr. Ronnie Floyd's new book, ***Ten Percent: A Call to Biblical Stewardship*****,** has this sobering quote:

> By the year 2050, at the present rate of decline in giving to the church, Americans will only give 1.66% of their disposable incomes to the church. This means that in less than thirty years, your church could see almost a fifty percent decline in giving. Every church will be impacted by this, with thousands closing their doors for good. [1.]

Dr. Floyd wrote that just as the pandemic was spreading across America. Now, with many church doors still closed, the decline has picked up momentum. That impact caused David Kinnaman, president of the Barna Group, to say that one in five churches could close their doors forever in the next 18 months due to lockdowns. He made that statement months ago!

The decline in giving started in the late 1960s. It's been the problem we all know we need to do something about, but we never get around to it. We ignore the issue because each year's decline is a mere fraction of a percentage. It's like a leak in your garage roof. Small leaks are something you can work around. You tolerate it until your roof collapses on your car. That is a bad time to fix the roof.

The financial "roofs" of our churches depend upon its members' faithful stewardship. Our financial roof has multiple leaks that, if not repaired, could cause future problems. One of the driving reasons giving is declining is the shifting age demographic of our donors. Our key giving group, Baby Boomers, is almost at the apex of their

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careers, with many retiring. The percent they give might not change, but the amount they have to give certainly will. At the same time, younger generations have failed to show signs of filling the void our Seniors and Boomers leave behind.

This is why I think we need to drop using the word "generosity" and go back to biblical stewardship. We must train up the next generation of stewards to fuel the mission of our churches into the future until Jesus comes back.

To address this issue, the Missouri Baptist Convention has launched a year-long emphasis on biblical stewardship. We've started a weekly e-newsletter called *The Stewardship Journal* to equip ministry leaders to help their churches achieve higher levels of financial security.

Christians who are good stewards live out a lifetime of generosity. They live that life in churches like yours. Week after week, year after year, they faithfully give, and through our cooperative work, they impact the world.

I remember registering for my first semester at Southwestern. Back in those days, nothing was online; there wasn't online! Registration was all paper-based. I remember scheduling and arranging all my classes.

The last table at "registration" was the payment table. I had my checkbook out, ready to pay the bill. When the bill was handed to me, I nearly fainted. It was well over $2,000! Back in my day, that was a ton of money. It was more than I anticipated, and indeed, more than a young seminarian could afford. I started reading through the bill and came to the last line before the subtotal was listed. The last line said, "Cooperative Program Scholarship," and then listed how much the CP paid on my bill. After my "scholarship," the bill was barely over $200. With relief, I wrote the check, and I was on my way.

Here is what I did not think about at the time, but I realize now: **My home church** was comprised of what the world would think were just simple people. Yet, they believed in tithing. Every Sunday, they brought their check to worship. Sunday after Sunday, year after year. A portion (17%) of that money went to the Cooperative Program. That CP money was then distributed across the SBC. A portion of every dollar went to Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and thus my "scholarship."

On that fall day, I could not pay for my education. But because people in my home church like the Seatons, the Sheltons, the Wilshires, and Leroy, my Sunday School teacher, faithfully practiced the tithe, I received a scholarship I didn't deserve. Men like Lloyd, a simple hardware store owner, obeyed God's Word and tithed into my future. I am forever grateful. Think about it, pastor: my story is *your* story! Should Jesus tarry, I want others to be able to tell the same story!

Forgive me if I sound a bit old school. I think I'll stick to using that good biblical word, "stewardship!" Welcome to the second edition of ***The Stewardship Journal.***

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Current Events and Relevant Thoughts From:

The Stewardship Coach

Mark Brooks

Building Systems and Stories

"Church attendance is not decreasing, it's decentralizing." Dave Anderson. Clearly, the Church is going through a time of transformation. Whatever is happening in your church in terms of attendance *will* impact your giving.

My job as your coach is to prepare you for the future, helping you achieve financial stability in these unstable times. Over the next few weeks, we are going to work on building out a stewardship platform for you. I'll lay out for you the basics for building your stewardship platform.

Back to my opening quote from Dave Anderson. I read that in early 2019! I read it in a book by Phil Bowdle titled ***Rethink Communication: A Playbook to Clarify and Communicate Everything in Your Church*.** He made what now appears a prophetic point in this book when he wrote:

"To effectively communicate your message, you'll need to stop building your strategy exclusively around physical attendance. Why? As my friend Dave Anderson says, "Church attendance is not decreasing, it's decentralizing." [1.]

COVID-19 helped us see what was already happening by speeding up the rate of decentralization. As I stated, this will impact your giving if you don't build a stewardship platform to address this issue. How do we accomplish this? By **building systems and stories.** Let's unpack that by first answering…

What systems should you have in place?

1. **Dynamic website.** Your website is the first place most people will visit *before* they ever darken your doors. Make yours a good one!
2. **Robust online giving platform including text and app giving.** COVID-19 taught us the importance of an online giving platform. Digital giving *is* our future.
3. **Social Media platform and presence.** Like it or not, and sometimes I hate it, Social Media is where many people spend a great bulk of their time. If you are not there you are missing an opportunity to connect with your people and those in your community.
4. **Postage paid envelopes.** I know this sounds old school but, in fact, this can be a great tool if used properly.
5. **Extensive database of your donors and the tools to use that data.** You need to have the ability to break this list down by various subgroups like first time givers, by consistency, etc. Programs like Mail Chimp, Constant Contact, and other programs allow you to send hundreds of emails at one time. They also allow for segmenting your lists so that your email can be directed to the correct targeted group. These tools are inexpensive and well worth what you will pay.
6. **Offering talks.** On-campus or live streaming, it is essential that each offering time has a talk connecting your vision to giving.

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Building Systems and Stories

Systems are like the branches of a Christmas tree. Each is separate but, when interacting together, they form a unified tree. Each of your systems needs to interact together to meet the demand people have for options. Make sure your systems that support giving are all up to date and working. Then we can hang stories on those branches. Stories of life change illustrate your mission and vision in action.

Stories are what touch the heart of a donor. To gain that first gift, you must make the connection of how a dollar given at your church makes the world a better place. One of the best ways to do that is to tell the story of what your church is accomplishing for the Kingdom. Stories illustrate your mission and vision.

Your story is your vision in action. I've stopped asking church leaders to tell me about their vision. They typically gave me their pithy vision statement. Instead, I started asking them to tell me about their story. They would share their heart and their dreams. That experience led me to coin one of my key giving mantras…

Get a story, work your story, tell your story and people will give to support your story.

Your vision, aka, story, better be good to be heard above the roar of everything coming at your members. Why?

"People are bombarded with more than 3,000 marketing messages every 24 hours." [2.]

This means you must be creative and consistent in communication to get your story heard. See the Bonus Section for more on this.

The good news is, our story is the greatest story ever told. The story of Jesus, the Savior for the world. Before they can hear your story you must have the systems in place. Without a compelling story the best systems in the world are worthless. You need both. Let's start building your systems and stories!

Mark Brooks – The Stewardship Coach
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Find out how to access all of my playbooks at https://acts17generosity.com/store/

1. Page 34 Rethink Communication: A Playbook to Clarify and Communicate Everything in Your Church, **2019** Center for Church Communication

2.Building a Storybrand, by Donald Miller, Harper Collins Leadership, 2017, page 230

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Bonus Material

Your Story and The Connecting Power of Vision

Dollars follow vision. Big visions get big dollars. You know what else follows vision? People. The more people you have, the more dollars you can raise. The more dollars you raise, the easier ministry is. It's what I call the connecting power of vision. Since dollars follow vision, it is vital that the story of your vision connects with people.

Your Vision matters! Thus, your church needs to be financially supported by all who believe in your vision. Your vision, properly communicated, will connect with your people, causing them to willingly give more to support that vision. This is true in good times and in bad times, like what we are currently living through.

In the fall of 2008, I started writing my first book, ***Recession Proof Your Offerings.*** One chapter was entitled, "Vision: The Reason People Give." If you remember, we were in the midst of what became known as The Great Recession. Scores of churches ceased to exist due to the financial pressure the economy created upon giving. I contend they did not have a giving problem. They had a vision problem. Here is what I wrote in 2008:

"Vision, when it comes to stewardship, is the main driver of why people give. Vision is what keeps me giving even when the economy is down. Never will vision be more important than in stressful economic times. Several years ago, I coined this truth: **Good Vision Trumps Bad Economy!"**

COVID-19 has created one of the greatest economic challenges in our lifetime. While our economy has rebounded somewhat, we are still not out of the woods. The economy does impact giving which is why you need to utilize the connecting power of vision to trump this bad economy. You need to tell the story of your vision.

What is vision? My friend, Herb Buwalda, came up with what I think is the best definition. He says "Mission" answers the question, "Why are you here?" "Vision" answers the question, "Where are you going; What is God asking of you now to impact the mission?"

To successfully use the connecting power of vision, always run your appeals through what I call **The Three C's of Vision.** Your vision needs to be:

1. **Clear** – Remember, Keep It Simple Somehow!
2. **Concise** – Can people repeat back in two to three sentences what you are asking them to give to? You need to be able to tell the story of your vision in two minutes or less.
3. **Compelling** – Does it touch their heart? If not, then the response will be less than you hoped for.

Vision starts in *your* heart. David had a vision to build a temple. He cast that vision in I Chronicles 28:2 which says, "King David rose to his feet and said: "Listen to me, my brothers and my people. ***I had it in my heart*** *to build* a house as a place of rest for the ark…" I believe it comes down to, **what is in your heart?**

Let me end with this question for you about the end-of-year vision you are trying to connect your people to. **Does it burn in *your* heart?** If not, then it will not burn in the hearts of your people.

One of the best ways to motivate people to give is through the connecting power of storytelling *your* vision. Next week we'll show you how to use your offering time to tell your story.

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Missions and Ministry Moment: Setting Up Your Offering

Every week we will provide what are called offering talks. We have found that the easiest way to see an increase in giving is to improve how you approach the offering time. Instead of telling people they don't have to give, we like to show them what giving to a church accomplishes. By showing people your mission and ministry focus, you will create a desire in your attendees to *want* to give to support that life change. That's why we call them Missions and Ministry Moments.

You can read it exactly how we write them or use them as idea starters for how the message would fit your culture and context. Our goal is to develop lifetime stewards, but we must get the first gift to begin them on the journey. Here is this week's offering talk.

National Returns Day

Did anyone return a Christmas gift last week? Be honest! Would it help you to know that there is actually a designated National Returns Day? Typically, it's January 2nd which is the first day you can ship back anything. Well over a million packages will be shipped every January 2nd. Millions or more packages are shipped the first week of January. If you returned something, you were not alone.

What causes people to return gifts? Aunt Bee's idea of chic is your idea of yuk. Uncle Bob gives you ties that looked great in the last century. It could be as simple as the wrong size. For whatever reason, the gift failed to meet expectations and was returned. Gifts, more often than not, get returned because the recipient doesn't value that gift.

Here is an observation. The more love we have for someone, the more we want our gift to them to be perfect. We want them to love our gift and never think of returning it. A gift given in love is a gift worth keeping. A gift given from love, even if we don't like it, has a better chance of being kept. How many of you have gifts from your kids that you never used but would never part with because of the love behind that gift?

When you give here at YOUR CHURCH NAME, we recognize that it is a gift motivated by your love of God. We treat every gift as valuable and important. We can do all we do only because of your generosity. Unlike people who don't use the gifts given to them, we use every gift to help advance the Kingdom of God. That is our mission and passion, and your generosity makes that happen.

So, while you might now be wondering if Aunt Sally kept your gift or returned it, please be assured that your gift today is appreciated and will be used. Thank you for your generosity!