



The Stewardship Journal

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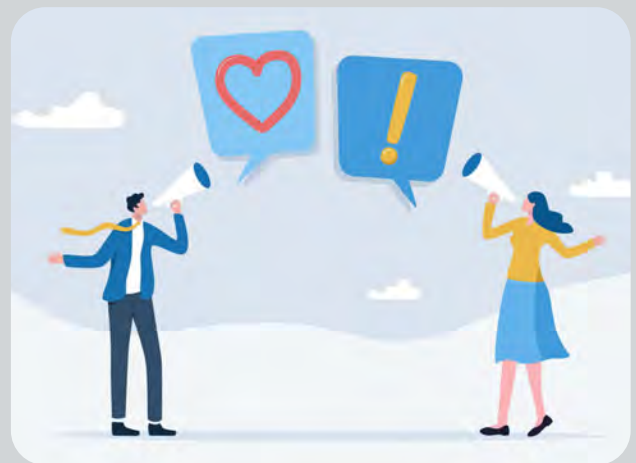
**From My Desk
to Your Inbox**



**The Coach's End-of-Year
Planning Edition**



**The Coach's Playbook for
End-of-Year Giving**



**A Wake-Up Call
to Engage Donors**

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From My Desk to Your Inbox

Are you prepared to start preparing for the end of the year?

Mark Brooks, The Stewardship Coach, sets the tone for this issue in his first post, ***The Coach's End-of-Year Planning Edition***, where Mark shows how you can maximize this time of year. Then, in his article, ***The Coach's Playbook for End-of-Year Giving***, you gain insight into basic, specific ways your team can encourage giving.

Finally, ***A Wake-Up Call to Engage Donors*** provides an update on the state of giving in America and probes for solutions on how to best engage disengaged donors.

Remember, if you're wanting to search through past issues of *The Stewardship Journal*, you can find them at stewardshipjournal.com or LouisianaBaptists.org/Stewardship.

Keep Looking Up,



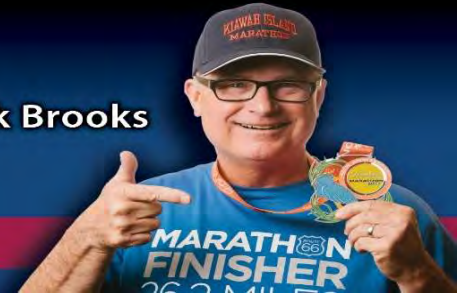
Dr. Steve Hauer

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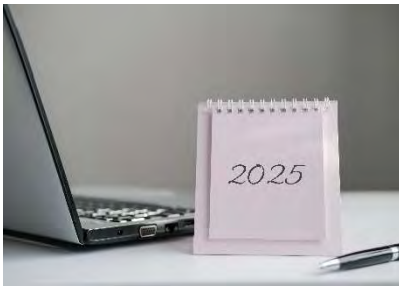


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Mark Brooks



The Coach's End-of-Year Planning Edition



It's September, which means it is time to start thinking, planning, and praying about your end-of-year giving strategy. Every September, I know it is time to focus on end-of-year giving as I am already getting end-of-year appeals from non-profit charities. So, I want to help you start your planning process now with this Coach entitled *The Coach's End-of-Year Planning Edition*.

As much as **30% of non-profit annual giving occurs in December, with 10% occurring on the last three days of the year.** In my experience, churches also see an increase in giving in December, especially if they have a plan and work that plan.

If you want to have a successful end-of-year giving campaign, you must understand that:

Preparation is the key to a successful end-of-year giving campaign. Every NFL team has a 2-Minute Drill strategy that they practice every week. They know that the difference between winning and losing is how you finish the game's last quarter. Often, the game is decided in the last few minutes. They plan for the inevitable. To be successful in end-of-year giving, you have to plan! You would think that would be a no brainer but...

One of the biggest reasons churches underperform in their end-of-year giving is the lack of preparation. Whether it is the Tyranny of the Urgent or something else, in my experience, most churches have zero plans to increase giving. Giving is the last thing we think of until the Treasurer tells us there isn't money to pay the bills or *your* salary.

Here are the basics for how you can actively plan out your end-of-year appeal.

- **Deciding what your "ask" will be.** You must be careful when you say that line out loud! A key point to remember is **need drives the "ask."** If you are behind budget, that is where you want to focus. Let's say, however, that you are ahead of budget but need help in other areas like a capital campaign or a special need. The fourth quarter is one of the best times to jump-start lagging giving. Determine where you need the money the most, which is what the appeal needs to focus on.
- **Craft the story behind the "ask."** Every "ask" or appeal must have what I call a driver behind it. In other words, what will drive or motivate me to give you more money? The story is the vision of the appeal. The more compelling the story or vision, the more successful that "ask."
- **Be positive!** You might be way behind on giving, but you want your donors to WANT to give, not feel like they MUST give.
- **Make the appeal not about reaching some number but about advancing the Kingdom.** Even if you are working to close out a budget shortfall, appeal for doing ministry rather than hitting your budget number. Most of your donors don't care about a number, but they do care about people.

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- **Make it personal.** Churches do poorly in telling people all the amazing things they do. So, blow your horn, celebrate the year's wins, and then ask people to help you keep on reaching people! One of the best ways to do that is to share personal stories of life change. Then, end by saying, "Your generosity helps make stories like this happen."
- **Focus on one thing, not multiple things.** One big mistake churches often make is sending multiple messages about what to give to and where. Asking, for one thing, will give you a better chance of success.

The exception is combining all the various things you want end-of-year giving to support into one offering. I have a client who runs a Christmas offering every year but announces the three to four ministry areas the money will be used for. It is one offering working to meet multiple needs.

- **Make it easy for them to contribute.** The easier you make it for people to give, the more likely they will give. Contact my sponsor, OnlineGiving.org, at (615) 206-4000 or support@onlinegiving.org.
- **Get your tools ready to support your end-of-year appeal.** My goal for clients is that by mid-October, we have identified the need and built out the message or story for the call to action.

As I always say, you can't wait until Saturday night to start planning for an end-of-year appeal! This is why I start hammering away at you in September. Over the next few weeks, I will be sharing with you more information and advice on how you can have your best end-of-year giving ever.

2025 changes to The Stewardship Coach - I'm announcing a major change in direction with the Stewardship Coach. I will be moving it to become a column within another newsletter I have produced for Southern Baptists, the *Stewardship Journal*. Additionally, I am moving to a magazine type monthly format rather than a weekly newsletter. I intend each month to focus on a key stewardship topic like budget planning, end-of-year plans, and more. Each issue will essentially contain what is now my Stewardship Coach newsletter, as well as other articles I write and those I use from other sources. If you want to see how this looks now, you can visit the site at <https://stewardshipjournal.com/>.

My ultimate goal is to write on key topics so that church leaders can have at their hands the resources they need for every season in the life of a church. My passion has, and will remain, **reversing the decline in giving one church at a time, starting with your church!**



Mark Brooks – The Stewardship Coach
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OnlineGiving.org, the leading online giving processor in America, sponsors my writing. Find out more about their services at <https://www.onlinegiving.org/>.

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Bonus Section

The Coach's Playbook for EOY Giving

If you have ever paid attention to football head coaches during a game, you will see they have a sheet of paper with various plays listed for each situation the team might face, including the last few minutes of the game. The following is my list of plays for an end-of-year overview. Not all of what I list might work for you. If followed, this basic plan of action WILL greatly increase your end-of-year giving. I advise...

Social Media Push—Starting in early November, across all communication platforms, you want to focus on your message, heightening awareness. A picture is worth a thousand words. Let's show the need before we make the "ask!"

Thank you email in early November—We always ask, but we seldom thank. So, send out an email or letter thanking donors for their giving success thus far. This is not an appeal but a cultivation, and it also serves to warm your list.

First Direct Appeal Letter, Week of November 15th—I recommend that your direct appeal end-of-year letter be sent out no later than this date. For ease of use, this letter should have a postage-paid, self-addressed envelope.

December Plan of action: I recommend ramping up information about the "ask " across all communications platforms. Now, we are specifically asking people to give. Before, we were priming the pump with awareness of need. Now, work to bring home donations to meet that need. Here are my ideas.

Utilize "Giving Tuesday." The Tuesday after Thanksgiving is being established across the country as a time when charities ask people to give. You should piggyback on this with an email strategy asking for a gift that day.

Special Landing Page on your website – Consider purchasing a special page with a dedicated address. Titles such as Wells4Africa.com can be bought cheaply and forwarded to your giving pages.

Social Media—You want to put a face on the "ask" AND provide direct links to the giving page. I recommend starting with one a day early in the month and increasing the rate as we approach the end of the year.

Offering talks – Plan out sixty-second offering talks for each Sunday in December.

Screen announcements – Have screen announcements about the end-of-year offering that can be utilized before and after services.

Email campaign—I recommend at least two emails. I would send one out on Monday, the 23rd, and another at 2 PM on New Year's Eve, December 31st.

That is the bare-bones basics of my plans for the end of the year. Take the next few weeks to plan out in each of these points a plan of action that would fit your culture and context. Remember, vision driven "asks" are the most successful in terms of dollars raised. Start working on the message of your vision and how you want to communicate that message across all your platforms. The time you spend now will be repaid on December 31st!

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A Wake-Up Call to Engage Donors

Americans gave \$557 billion to charity in 2023. That's the good news. The bad news is even though the total dollars given to charity is up, the number of donors giving is down. Even more troubling, Americans now give only 1.7% of their disposable incomes to charities, the lowest level of giving in the last four decades. Those were the findings in a new wake-up report by the Generosity Commission called *The Shifting Landscape of American Generosity*.¹

If the above statistics don't alarm you, then consider these further findings in the study:

- 2023 giving declined by 2.1% after a decline in 2022 of 8.4%.
- Fewer Americans are involved in their community by volunteering and giving than ever in the last two decades.
- The share of U.S. households reporting that they had donated to a nonprofit organization dropped from 65% in 2008 to 49% by 2018. This was the first time it had been below 50%.
- The number of donors dropped by 3.4% in 2023 after having dropped by 10% in 2022 and by 5.7% in 2021.

This is but the tip of data that reveals that while charitable dollars are up, the number of donors and the percentage amount they give is declining. At the same time, volunteer hours are up, and the number of volunteers is down. Both facts are troubling for the future financial stability of churches. Yet one of the biggest concerns with the report lies in this finding, "More recently, researchers have linked the decline in charitable giving rates to the divergent beliefs, practices, and life experiences of younger age cohorts who are becoming a larger share of the giving population." Here is a post we wrote about this:

<https://www.onlinegiving.org/support/attracting-the-next-generation-of-donors>

There are many reasons for the decline in charitable giving. One major reason is the decline in American religious affiliation and participation in religious institutions. The report states that "Surveys from the Pew Research Center have shown that Americans who attend religious services weekly are more than 50% more likely to have given to charity in the last week than those who do not attend, while research from the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy has demonstrated that the average annual charitable contributions of Americans who claim religious affiliation are more than twice as large as those who do not." As a result, "...the share of households that give to religious organizations or causes has fallen more steeply than the share of households giving to secular organizations, dropping from more than 46.5% in 2000 to 29% in 2018."

None of the above is good news. However, there are nuggets of encouraging data that should serve as a guide to reversing these trends. For instance, the report found, "The frequency of people's engagement with nonprofits as donors, volunteers, advocates, and constituents positively impacts their level of trust in the broader sector." Those familiar with nonprofits were 39 points more likely to trust the sector than those unfamiliar with nonprofits. According to the 2024 report, 79% of Americans who volunteer say their experience made them view nonprofits more favorably."

The Shifting Landscape of American Generosity is a wake-up call for the Church. For too long, we sat passively by, watching the yearly decline in giving. We must act now to reverse this trend. This is one major reason we at OnlineGiving.org do not consider ourselves as only a processing company. Our platform, tools, coaching, and support are all designed to help our church partners stay engaged with their donors. We believe that showing donors how your church works to change the world for good is the best way to encourage people to give. The generosity landscape of America has changed, and so must we.

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Don't be discouraged. Let me share with you one encouraging report from the study. They reported that "the desire to do good" is at a 50-year high among entering college students. Where else in the world is more good done than at your church dedicated to sharing THE Good News? We are committed to helping you share your church's mission so donors will be motivated to serve and give to your church.

Contact us today to set up a free demonstration of how our platform can help you stay engaged with your donors at (615) 206-4000 or support@onlinegiving.org. It's time to wake up and take action; we are here to help you!

Written by Mark Brooks
The Stewardship Coach

The following post is reprinted with permission at: <https://www.onlinegiving.org/support/a-wake-up-call-to-engage-donors>

1. https://www.thegenerositycommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Generosity-Commission_Landscape-Analysis_072424_Final.pdf?goal=0_b82a25e92a-3e63e6de59-429417656&mc_cid=3e63e6de59&mc_eid=b3d6b62414