

The Stewardship Journal

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**From My Desk
to Your Inbox**



**Preparing Now
for the 2030s**



**How to Engage
Younger Donors**



**Turn First-Time Givers
into Lifelong Givers**

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From My Desk to Your Inbox

The urgency of the present can easily overshadow the importance of planning for the future, but your church's stewardship depends on your plan. This week, Mark Brooks, the Stewardship Coach, explains the why and how of financial security for the upcoming decade in ***Preparing Now for the 2030s***.

Preparing for the future means understanding your donors. Learn ***How to Engage Younger Donors*** and how to ***Turn First-Time Givers Into Lifelong Givers*** through planning and engagement.

Missed a week? Past issues of *The Stewardship Journal* are available for you at stewardshipjournal.com or LouisianaBaptists.org/Stewardship.

Keep Looking Up,



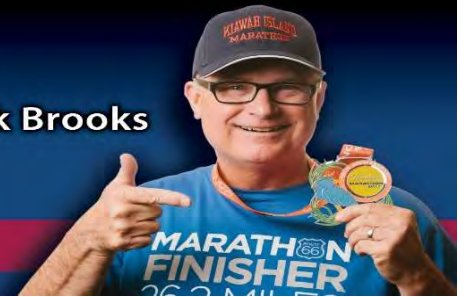
Dr. Steve How

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THE STEWARDSHIP COACH
REVERSING THE DECLINE IN GIVING

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Mark Brooks



Preparing Now for the 2030s



I'm focused on helping churches be financially secure by 2030. For years, I have marched under the motto, "Reversing Giving One Church at a Time." With the decline of giving picking up speed and endangering the future of thousands of churches, there is never a better time to prepare for the future than now. Remember, one of my key Brooks mantras, "The Church that exists in the future is the church that prepares for the future today." In my lead column, *Preparing Now for the 2030s*, I want to explain why and how to be financially secure for this coming decade. As to why, consider...

"The average evangelical Protestant gave 1.7% of household income to church over the past 12 months, with a median of just two-tenths of one percent. Because of both lower generosity among those who are still giving and a drop in the proportion who give anything to church, **the average has fallen 28% over the past three years** from 2.4% generosity in 2021. The median has fallen from 0.6% three years ago."¹

The first step toward preparing for the future is understanding what lies ahead. The above quote was from one of my leading statements weeks ago on the state of giving in America. As I've expressed, the situation is concerning. I've voiced my frustration that denominational executives and pastors of churches of all sizes are turning a blind eye to the trends in front of them. It took Covid-19 to awaken many pastors. Now, with America fully back, they seem to have forgotten the lessons of those March days of 2020. Covid revealed how fragile the typical church's finances are. If we don't act, that is our future. But remember, you have the power to change this future. If you don't act *now*, you won't have a future.

Why? If you do some research, you will find that you survived the closures and lockdowns forced upon us because your top-tiered donors bailed you out. All that online engagement didn't create new donors digging deep to keep your church open. It was your dedicated members who already had the biblical concept of stewardship down. How many of them are Baby Boomers entering into, or already in, retirement? If you want to know what your future is, simply do the math and see how many of the top 50% of your current donor base are 60 years or older. In five years, their giving capacity will be greatly reduced. Are you bringing up the next generation of generous disciples?

Yes, the stewardship of your members is your pastoral duty and responsibility. Last year, I saw a study that revealed that young people get their financial information from the Internet. Less than 10% of those polled stated they sought advice from a pastor. This directly results from the misguided belief that pastors should never be involved with stewardship and that any teaching or preaching on stewardship will hurt our crowd size. After all, that is what we are interested in, right, crowds? By making our services almost exclusively outreach moments for the lost, we have failed to teach biblical stewardship. With the passing of Boomers, the last educated generation of biblical donors, giving will start declining.

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Attitudes must change, or churches will close. “All you care about is money,” a denominational worker commented after one of my posts went out. I care about what money represents, what is truly in people’s hearts. Show me a generous person, and I will show you a person whose heart is in tune with God and who is financially secure. Our goal as ministers is to help people to become fully devoted and developed disciples of Jesus. Teaching your flock biblical stewardship benefits them and your church. *It is your business!*

Biblical stewardship is more taught than caught. Sometimes, a shepherd must lead the flock of sheep in a direction they don’t want to go. Left to themselves, they will follow the lead sheep right off a cliff. With continued economic uncertainty, we must prepare our flocks away from the destructive cliffs ahead. Providing this direction *is* your responsibility.

What’s your plan? Can you tell me in sixty seconds how you plan to position your church for financial stability by 2030? If you can’t, you are planning on failure. I get that you are busy. But, if you keep kicking down the road planning for your future financial security, you are risking the future of your church.

Right now, I am watching my denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, continue selling land, buildings, and assets in the vain hope of keeping their existing budgets sustainable. It won’t work. It will only hasten further decline. The answer, which they are ignoring, is to develop plans for how to help as many individual churches as possible survive, not the survival of the Convention’s programs. They know they have a problem. They don’t know how to solve it. Do you, when it comes to your church?

What is your immediate and long-term vision? In a couple of weeks, I will sit down with a pastor of one of the leading churches in America. We are set to talk about many of the issues I am raising in this column. It will be four hours of talking about church, community, culture, and how best to position this pastor’s heart and vision for the remaining years of ministry God has for him. My rough outline of the meeting is to help him arrive at immediate goals in the next twelve to thirty-six months and longer-term goals into and beyond the 2030s. Starting in early 2020, I began advocating for pastors to adopt a similar strategy. Are you thinking this way?

I’ve been thinking about this, even before Covid hit. I’m going to keep a focus on this as long as God allows me. My passion is to help you reverse the decline in giving at your church. Keep reading!



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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How to Engage Younger Donors

How do we engage younger people, with Baby Boomers aging out as our primary donors? I wrote the following post for my sponsor, OnlineGiving.org, that shares creative ways to accomplish this. The post can be found at: <https://www.onlinegiving.org/support/how-to-engage-younger-donors>

Recent reports on the state of giving in America have revealed that engaging younger generations to become motivated to give generously is one of the Church's greatest challenges. One such study, *The Giving Gap: Changes in Evangelical Generosity*, states, "The youngest evangelicals have seen the greatest declines in generosity. Currently, generosity is more than three times higher among the oldest evangelicals as it is among the youngest."¹

With Baby Boomers, most churches' most generous age group, entering their retirement years, it is imperative that churches train up the next generation of younger donors. Reading statistics that show that younger donors have yet to step up could fill a church leader with despair. However, the bad news does contain kernels of good news that we should focus on.

If you drill down into these reports, you will find that younger generations are willing to give if they are motivated. A recent report from the Giving USA Foundation, featuring a survey by Dunham+Company, found that "millennials and Gen Z (born 1997–2012) have the highest rates of donors who had given through a charity's website or a smartphone or tablet, as well as having the highest rates of donors who were influenced to give through social media."² The question is, how do you engage younger generations?

Two years ago, I interviewed a local pastor for an article I was writing for his denomination on their progress with young adults. Here is what he said, "I think one of our greatest challenges is connecting with younger generations in a way that engages them to become good stewards. We all know that there is a passing of the generational baton, but I fear we have made some assumptions about the younger generations that are not helpful. People don't feel like we truly understand them. We need to work on this. For one thing, I find most pastors assume their audience is more biblically literate than they are. We need to assume they know nothing and start with answering the question, 'Why do we give?' It is not enough to say the Bible says to give. We must tell them why it says that. I find this is especially important to younger generations. When they grasp the *why* of giving and see what giving can accomplish, they are all in."

I call this connecting the dots. To gain the first gift, you must help the donor see the potential that their gift can make. Multiple studies have shown that younger generations are highly motivated to be a part of something that will make a difference. The difference the Church makes is eternal.

The ultimate question becomes, how do we engage younger people? You might find this curious, but we at OnlineGiving.org believe our platform and tools are tailored to engage with all your donors. Our platform works perfectly across all major communication platforms. Using our system, you can communicate the story of what you are doing with each appeal through multiple platforms. Our church partners can instantly communicate with members anywhere in the world.

To read more about how to attract younger donors, check out this post: <https://www.onlinegiving.org/support/attracting-the-next-generation-of-donors>

As I approach issues like this, I am reminded of the Parable of the Great Banquet that Jesus shares in Luke 14:15-23. The story is about a man preparing a great banquet and sending his servants out to invite guests. When they return, stating that all had rejected his invitation, the master said to his servants, "Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in so that my house will be full." For your message to be heard, it must be declared where people are. Today, they are online, on social media, and highly mobile. We must learn how to engage with younger generations to reverse the decline in giving. At OG, we have created a platform with plans to help any church do exactly that! To learn more about how we can do this for your church, contact us at (615) 206-4000 or drop us a line at support@onlinegiving.org.

1. Infinity Concepts | Grey Matter Research, *The Giving Gap: Changes In Evangelical Generosity*. 2024 report.
2. Giving USA Foundation, *Giving by Generation*. 2024 report.

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With summer over and the Holiday season ahead, your church will be seeing new faces and faces you haven't seen in a while. How can you motivate them to give and then give continually? This post shares the importance of a plan of action and ideas on how to implement a plan of action.

Turn First-Time Givers Into Lifelong Givers

How do you turn first-time givers into lifelong givers? As we begin end-of-year plans, one key focus is starting people on the path of biblical stewardship. Americans have historically shown great generosity at the end of the year. With Christmas being one of the two most attended services, next to Easter, it stands to reason you will have many first-time donors. Wise churches think of how they can motivate this segment to move toward a lifelong practice of generosity.

90 days. This is the critical window. Studies have shown that if you don't get another gift from a first-time donor after ninety days, it is unlikely that they will ever give again. Most churches don't have a follow-up plan for first-time givers. What would a plan look like? I want to share some basic elements of a plan in this post. I will show you how, with OnlineGiving.org's platform and tools, we can help you execute your plan successfully.

First, let me state what your motivation should be, the donor. I get criticized a lot for focusing on giving. I write to church leaders, not the laity, so my advice is practical inside the engine room strategy. My passion is to help people see the blessings of a life of generosity built upon biblical stewardship. I firmly believe that God blesses those who give generously. My appeals focus on the gift's impact in an attempt to gain the first gift. After the first gift, my goal is to move that donor further down the path of discipleship to live out God's call of being good stewards. In doing that, I ensure the financial security of both the members and the church.

Next, without a plan, you are planning to fail. Most churches don't have a first-time giver plan, and this is a critical gap that needs to be addressed. It should start with getting the first gift. But to gain the first gift, I advise my clients to focus on the why of the "ask." Don't just ask people to give. Give them a compelling reason to give. This Christmas season, your members will hear from non-profit organizations claiming the importance of giving to their cause. You must have your cause be heard above the roar of all the requests coming your members' and attendees' way. OnlineGiving.org's platform and tools are perfect for this.

See the following post for more: <https://www.onlinegiving.org/support/we-are-more-than-just>

The first part of any plan must be to track first-time donors. You can't reach out to your first-time donors if you don't track that metric. Our Dashboard gives our partners the ability to track each first-time gift weekly. You can even see when they gave, how they gave, and what fund they gave to. This information can help you craft follow-up appeals and information within the ninety-day window. Here is a post explaining our Dashboard's benefits:

<https://www.onlinegiving.org/support/not-your-fathers-dashboard>

We see an 80% open rate on the automated receipts sent out immediately after someone gives online through our system. This is your first line of strategy to move donors to being long-time donors. We show our partners how to use this email to communicate compelling messages that generate additional gifts. By telling your story of how generosity improves lives, donors become more motivated to give.

Recent studies have shown the importance of staying engaged with donors. Once again, OG has you covered with the industry's best engagement platform. Using our platform and systems allows you to keep all donors engaged in the impact of their generosity. Through regular targeted messaging, you can craft compelling appeals that will help motivate not only first-time donors to give again but your entire congregation will be motivated. We help our partners make this process seamless and easy. Does your provider do that for you?

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Here is another recent post about the importance and power of engagement:

<https://www.onlinegiving.org/support/engagement-solutions-drive-generosity>

Finally, focusing on setting up recurring giving is the best way to move donors to consistency. Recurring giving is a benefit for both your donors and your church. Donors no longer need to worry about carrying cash or a checkbook to church. This consistency, multiplied many times across your donor base, will make a huge difference in your church's ability to do the missions and ministry you feel led to do. That is a driving reason to gain new, consistent donors who are fully engaged with your mission and generously giving to support that work.

For more on the value of recurring giving, read this post: <https://www.onlinegiving.org/support/the-value-of-recurring-giving>

These simple but practical steps will help you turn your first-time givers into lifelong givers. Are you turning first-time donors into consistent donors? We would love to give you a personal tour of our platform and show you how our tools can better help you engage all members, especially first-time donors. Contact us today at (615) 206-4000 or support@onlinegiving.org.

The previous post can be found at: <https://www.onlinegiving.org/blog>