

The Stewardship Journal

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**From My Desk
to Your Inbox**



**The Retirement
Issue**



**Are You Prepared for the
Two-Minute Warning?**



**The Basic Steps for
Effective Appeals**

THE STEWARDSHIP JOURNAL

From My Desk to Your Inbox

It's hard to believe the end of the year is so close. This week, the Stewardship Coach Mark Brooks checks in with his article, ***Are You Prepared for the Two-Minute Warning?*** Since we're at the end of October, the two minute warning for end of the year giving has sounded. What does that mean for your church? Mark also provides ***The Basic Steps for Effective Appeals***, three proven tools to aid in your end-of-year appeal.

This week's issue is titled The Retirement Issue, where Mark announces his retirement. We are grateful for Mark's ministry and the wealth of knowledge he's shared with us over the course of this year.

Even though Mark will no longer write *The Stewardship Coach* newsletter after December, all past issues and other resources will still be available at stewardshipjournal.com or LouisianaBaptists.org/Stewardship.

Keep Looking Up,



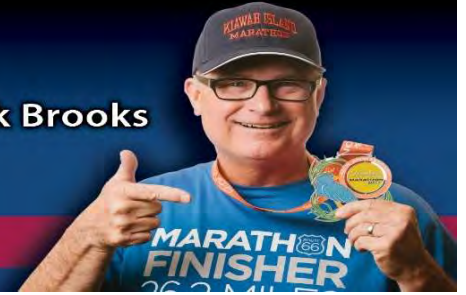
Dr. Steve How

THE STEWARDSHIP JOURNAL

THE STEWARDSHIP COACH
REVERSING THE DECLINE IN GIVING

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Mark Brooks



The Retirement Issue



“I think we will know when it is time to retire.” My high school wrestling buddy, who also serves as my financial advisor, made that comment to me back in 2018. When you get my age, retirement is all your buddies talk about. I wasn’t ready to retire, but I was ready to get off 100 airplanes a year! Yesterday, sitting on my porch pouring over notes, research, and past writing in an attempt to be brilliant, it hit me. I’m ready to retire my newsletters. So, with this Coach, I am announcing the retirement of my newsletters, *The Stewardship Coach* and the *Stewardship Journal*, with my final edition coming out in early December. I’ve named this *Coach* **The Retirement Issue**.

Back in June, I started thinking and praying about my future. You do that when you reach 67. In particular, my thoughts were about where to take my writing. I am not interested in retirement; it's more like re-engagement. But where? Honestly, my field of topic is narrow, and after over 1,000 blog posts, five books, countless e-books, and hundreds of newsletters, I have written on every stewardship topic imaginable. I find myself self-plagiarizing on topics I have already written on because, well, I can’t say it any better. I’ve never wanted to be that guy that coasts into retirement.

I had thought and even communicated, that I would go another year moving toward a monthly magazine format dealing with a specific stewardship topic each month. To be honest, there are few people interested in that project. OK, that’s not true, no one is interested! To save money, one of the state conventions that was sponsoring me has already canceled. Let that sink in. Apparently, not enough church leaders in their state are interested in what I am writing.

“You write the best stuff on stewardship. Your problem is no one cares.” My friend, Brian Dodd, told me that several years ago. Compliments like that sting. It’s true, though. I’m not sure I write the best stuff, but I know no one else who cranks out prose on giving and stewardship like I do. My problem isn’t that church leaders are not interested. The problem is, they haven’t *seen* the problem. A secondary problem is church leaders are crushed by the tyranny of the urgent. A final problem is church leaders have zero training in stewardship. And most, including their denominational leadership, have zero interest in learning until it’s too late.

The window of opportunity is closing. In 2018, I began writing about the shift in generational giving. I stated then that experts were saying we had about a five-year window of opportunity to maximize Baby Boomer's giving impact and train up the next generation of donors. Now, we are seeing the projected declines in giving accelerate. In my denomination, the SBC, our agencies, and state conventions are selling assets in order to survive. Many churches have missed that window of opportunity, and they, as well, will be faced with difficult decisions in the coming years. Most will close forever.

But not you! If I have been a good coach, you will carry on fine without me, hopefully using the principles I have taught you. My goal is to provide you with the best stewardship advice in these next few weeks. My focus will be on ending the year well and setting up a great start for 2025. Serving you has been my honor. Thank you for your years of support! Let’s continue to keep you fully funded!



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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Let's get ready for end-of-year giving! The next few weeks the *Journal* will contain portions of my playbook, *The Two Minute Drill for Giving: How to Build an Effective End-of-Year Strategy*.

Are You Prepared for the Two-Minute Warning?

Are you prepared for the two-minute warning when it comes to increasing your giving? If you are a football fan, you know what the two-minute warning is. Winning teams have set two-minute drills they run, which they repeatedly practice throughout the year. **The two-minute warning for a church is the start of end-of-year giving.** Consider this for nonprofits:

- 30% of annual giving occurs in December.
- 12% of annual giving occurs on the last 3 days of the year.

Churches are no different, seeing a huge upswing in giving in the last quarter of the year. Whether your fiscal year ends in the fourth quarter or not, the statistics show that end-of-year giving can make a huge difference. That means...

Your 4th quarter might be the difference between making budget or not.

Since the 4th quarter is so important, NOW is the time to prepare for your best 4th quarter.

It starts by understanding that:

- ✓ **Preparation is the key to a successful 4th quarter of giving.**
- ✓ **The lack of preparation is one of the biggest reasons churches underperform in their end-of-year giving.** Now is the time to finalize our plans for end-of-year giving. Let's get started.

The basics of an end-of-year appeal – Here are some basic thoughts for you to think through.

- **Deciding what your "ask" will be.** Determine where you need the money the most, which is what the appeal needs to focus on. **See the Vision Worksheet on page 9.**
- **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?
- **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 advancing the Kingdom.**
- **Make it personal.**
- **Focus on one thing, not multiple things.**
- **Make it easy for them to contribute.**
- **Get your tools ready to support your end-of-year appeal.**

My goal for you is to raise at least one week's worth of offering for your church!

December 31 will be here before you know it. The time to plan for end-of-year giving is now. The sooner you start your planning, the more effective your end-of-year giving results will be. Let's get started!

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I recommend multiple end-of-year appeals be sent across all your platforms. Here is a post about how to best position your appeals for maximum effectiveness.

The Basic Steps for Effective Appeals

The 21st-century offering must be 24/7. To be effective, your offering plate must never be closed. An effective end-of-year strategy must include direct appeals, snail-mail, email, and text appeals.

The following are the basic steps I use to make my appeals more readable and, thus, more effective.

Direct USPS Mail Appeals – It might surprise you that I would focus on using the USPS for any appeal in this day of online giving. Why would I do this? Easy, **Snail mail still works!** Think about it, how many appeals do you get in the US mail? There is a reason nonprofits still send out snail mail; they work.

USPS Basics – Use these basic points to improve your snail mail appeals.

- Personalize the letter. The more personal the message, the more apt someone is to read it.
- Try and keep the letter to one page. The exception might be appeals sent to leaders.
- Use bold and underlined text to highlight key points. People skim, so highlight the important points.
- *Always* use a PS. Studies show people almost always read a PS.
- *Always* give your online giving portal address. Studies show that even Seniors will type in your giving portal if you provide one.
- Include a self-addressed postage-paid envelope with all letters.

Email Basics – Many of the same principles above apply to email. One thing that is important to remember is that most emails are now read on a smart device.

- Captivating Subject line! If they don't open it, they can't read your message.
- Short and to the point! Again, most emails are read on a smart device.
- Two to four paragraphs of two to four sentences. Be short and to the point.
- Use bold and underlined text.
- Clickable links to your giving page. You want to make it quick and easy to give.
- Multiple links to the giving page.
- Always have a PS! I almost always have the online giving link as my PS.
- Personalize it! Programs like Mailchimp make this easy.

Your members will be getting numerous appeals from now until the New Year. Your story is a familiar story to those connected to your church. By telling that story in short but effective messages you can close out the year strong. Start working on your message today!