



The Stewardship Coach Volume 7 / Issue 5



“What are you doing right now to assure your church's financial stability?” That was my question to you last week as I began a two-part series entitled, ***The Two Tracks of Generosity***. I earn my keep with you, in part, by asking you the questions no one else is asking you. With the continual decline in giving to the Church, the above question is crucial for every church. **Do you have an answer?**

Part of my answer for you is helping you run your own two tracks of generosity. Last week was part one, dealing with what I call the Leaders Track. I will be

fleshing this out more in the next few weeks as I unpack what we are calling, **The Legacy Team**. This week is part two, where I will focus on the second track leading to financial stability, the Discipleship Track.

A couple of thoughts before I begin:

My passion and calling by God is to help as many churches survive into the future as possible. My goal for you is to increase your yearly giving and the number of people giving to your church. Who else thinks this way for you? Here is my second thought,

The Church did not get into the decline in giving overnight, and we will not get out of this decline overnight. There is no quick fix to the decline in giving, but there is a time-tested plan we can adapt. I believe the long-term solution to the decline in giving is through discipleship.

Why is discipleship so important? Here are two practical reasons.

We are mandated to make disciples. Jesus' last words to his disciples in Matthew 28 were to go to the ends of the earth, making disciples. He did not call us to attract a crowd. He never lowered the bar for anyone. We shouldn't either.

I believe one huge reason for the decline in giving is the decline in focusing upon making disciples. Disciples are generous. By making disciples, you are assuring your financial future by making generous members. That leads me to the second practical reason for stressing discipleship.

Discipleship driven churches have a higher average per giver than those that don't stress discipleship. I have spent well over twenty years analyzing church giving data. My findings are that churches with a more traditional discipleship process like Sunday School, always have a higher average per giver than those that do not stress discipleship. Sadly, Sunday School has fallen into disregard as most churches, *if* they have a discipleship process, would point to their small group ministry. Therein lies one of our problems.

It's time to rethink our small group strategies. Full disclosure. I hate small groups! Since resigning as a senior pastor, I have led or attended small groups in multiple churches. While some might study some trending book, Max Lucado seems a favorite; few actually study the Bible. Most small groups meet only for fellowship, ending in a brief prayer time. In the majority of churches that have a small group ministry, few have a set plan that

results in making and deepening discipleship. The result is, we are producing illiterate church members who give only small portions to your church. I contend we do not have a giving problem. We have a discipleship problem.

What does the Discipleship Track need to look like?

In 2018, I wrote the following about discipleship being the key to building financial stability.

Here are some key things you should be doing right now:

- **Teach the stewardship of life.** I know stewardship is not the cool, in buzz word. Yet, it encompasses what we in the Church MUST teach. Stewardship of life pertains to more than just giving. It's why I like it better than the new buzz word: generosity.
Stewardship of life pertains to every area of your life being dedicated to the cause of Christ. When you have a Stewardship of Life concept, you escape the money and possession trap and thus are positioned to be able to afford being generous. Let's teach that from the womb to the tomb. To sum it up, it's called Discipleship.
- **Get them out of debt!** From Baby Boomers to Millennials and Gen Z, debt is strangling the life out of our members, keeping them from living a generous life. I believe that every church needs to offer some type of program yearly, like Financial Peace or others, to help your members escape the bondage of debt. You'll do them a favor, and in return, it will help your church as well.

How do you do this practically? First, the Senior Pastor has to be all in for this to work. If the Senior Pastor is fearful of any talk about money, finances, or giving, there will always be a struggle to fund missions and ministry. If you have read this far, you are all in, so let me give you a practical road map for beginning The Discipleship Track.

First, start with the easiest thing a pastor can do, **preach a series on stewardship**. Notice I said series. Barna has shown that one-off sermons on giving are not as effective as a series on giving. Next, this will be tough for some to swallow, but I have an opinion about the frequency of which you should preach a stewardship series. My preference is *every year!* **Right now, start planning out your stewardship series for 2020.** Next, we need to,

Rethink small groups! Stop focusing upon the number of small groups or people involved in small groups. We need to ask this question of our small groups. Are people better equipped in God's Word as a result of being involved in your small groups or not? If not, it is time to rethink this strategy. Why?

We are called to make disciples! Period. You can't do that with thirty to forty-minute sermons. Where are your members going to gain depth in their relationship with God? How will your members learn about the joy of generosity unless you teach them?

In 2020, think of how you can best implement The Two Tracks of Generosity at your church.



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Monday Mornings With Mark will be held today at 11 AM EST.

To register go to, <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/8717451953717141517>

This Week's Offering Talk

At the start of the year, I always put a focus on recurring giving. With that in mind, here is this week's offering talk.

Are you in the 8%?

Only 8% of people who make New Year's Resolutions actually keep them. In fact, most resolutions don't make it past the end of January. I won't ask for a show of hands, but my guess is that more than a few of us have missed that weight loss resolution we set.

What if, when you made a resolution, you could set up a program to automatically fulfill your resolution? Take, for instance, the resolution to lose weight. What if your phone shocked you every time you consumed more calories than your diet allowed? You might have a better chance of fulfilling that weight loss resolution.

Let me take that thought to a resolution that many Christians make but often find difficult to fulfill. Many Christians entered the New Year with a desire to be more faithful in their generosity. Then the credit card bill comes mid-January and we think, I can start that generosity resolution later. Before you know it, the year will be up, and your generosity resolution keeps getting pushed to the back burner.

What if there was a program that automatically helped you be more generous? There is and we offer it through our online giving. It's simple to set up. Just go to our website at (Give your online giving page address) and follow the easy steps to make your gifts to our church automatically withdrawn from your account. Automated giving helps assure your resolution about generosity. You can be in the 8% that keeps their New Year's Eve resolutions!

Remember, there are multiple ways to give here - from online giving, to text giving, to the offering plate we are about to pass. No matter how you give, we are grateful for your generosity that helps us make a difference one life at a time!

Bonus Section

This past week, I had lunch with Jason Surratt, the Legacy Pastor at Seacoast Community Church in Charleston SC. Last Sunday, Seacoast announced an end-of-year offering of over \$1.12 million dollars! I asked Jason for some comments that I could post here.

Mark: So, tell me about the \$1.12 million dollars Seacoast raised in their end-of-year offering.

Jason: I think the bottom line is that our people heard of opportunities that resonated with them. We gave a list of things we have been praying about that needed funding in the coming year. Our people responded, and we received a 24% increase in our end-of-year giving from last year. Last year, we benefited from our new worship facility nearing completion. So, the response to what we called our Legacy Offering was even more encouraging.

Mark: I told someone the other day that you made it look easy. Essentially, you sent out one email and made a few announcements from the platform. There was a lot more that went into seeing over a million dollars come in. Tell me about that.

Jason: For us, this is a wholistic approach. For instance, we started laying the foundation for this by offering Financial Peace a couple of years ago. We started implementing what we call our Legacy Team about eight months to a year before we made the end of year appeal in 2019. Our Legacy Team is comprised of those that have the gift of generosity and who want to make a difference beyond simply their tithe. We held an initial dinner meeting, with all our campuses represented, where we invited those types of donors. We told them that we were going to keep them informed about opportunities that they might feel led to support financially. From there, we communicate weekly with that team, sending them devotional emails. Three times a year, we will send out a document that lists the various opportunities in what we call Lanes. For instance, we have a NextGen Lane, a Local Missions Lane, a Seacoast Project Lane, etc. Each lane lists specific items we need support for. People decide where and what they want to give. This set the foundation for our end-of-year appeal.

Mark: Anything interesting that you found as a result of this process and your Legacy Offering?

Jason: I was surprised that 3 or 4 of the top 10 gifts we received in our end-of-year offering came from people who really had not given up until that point, were not consistent donors to our church. Yet, for this offering, they gave significantly. For instance, one donor had been giving \$50 a month to our church and then in this offering gave \$50,000. I believe that the stories we told about the need moved the hearts of these people to give.

Mark: Beyond the end-of-year offering, how do you see the Legacy Team impacting Seacoast both now and in the long term?

Jason: The night we brought everyone together, to invite them to become a part of our Legacy Team, really set a new course for us. Those of us on staff were amazed that, after the hour and a half we planned for the meeting, people were still talking almost two hours *after* we concluded in prayer. I realized we were onto something. It gave those who were like-minded about generosity a community of like-minded people to fellowship with. People were excited about the vision and excited to be around others who shared that same excitement. People want to give to what they are passionate about and the Church often doesn't position giving that way. The way in which we shared the needs, asking people to pray, without guilt or pressure, helped our members "get it." So, talking to people who are wired this way really makes it easy to cast a vision for missions or projects and then simply let the Holy Spirit do the work.

Mark here. I can help you set up this process for your church. This is the future. Who's in?
