

Elevator Pitch Your Offerings

A Plan For Short Stewardship Messages



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Introduction

The Lack of Offering Time Strategy

One of the most boring times of any church service is the offering. Here is a question: How much time did you spend last week thinking about how the offering should be taken up? How much time did you spend thinking about what to say? If you are honest, probably little time to no time at all. We take offerings up week after week and the result is that it becomes one of the most overlooked areas of worship in our church. Most churches don't have an offering time strategy. It is no wonder the offering plate is not overflowing. It is time we change that with an elevator approach to offerings.

Elevator Pitch Your Offerings

A few years ago I saw a report on how to craft the perfect elevator pitch. It caught my interest. Around that time I began reading a book entitled, *The Influential Fundraiser*, and it talked about the importance of your elevator pitch.

The elevator pitch arrives from the idea that you are riding in an elevator when a big shot company executive enters in. You have maybe 30 seconds of time with him or her. What you say in those 30 seconds of riding the elevator will mean the difference of whether you get a full hearing later or are simply forgotten. The idea is to comprise the key information about you into a thirty second burst of energy that will "sell" your idea or you.

So, pretending I am on the elevator with you I might say, "Ah, Pastor Smith, you might have heard that giving to churches is off in this recession. In fact your church might be experiencing a decline in giving. When giving declines, ministry initiatives are threatened. Lives are impacted. Yet the churches we are partnering with have seen their giving go *up* during this recession. We work with good churches and make them better. I would love to talk to you about how we can increase your giving." That is better than simply, "Hi, my name is Mark and I would really like to talk to you about my company."

My point is you need an elevator pitch as well. If you think about it every Sunday you have an elevator moment - we call it the offering. Most pastors say something at that point in the service. Some explain away how people are not required to give; we don't want to offend the guests. Some almost beg for money to be given. Some use guilt or some other tactic. Once when I was working on Joel Osteen's campaign I attended Lakewood one Sunday morning. He had his wife Victoria take up the offering. All pastors have some approach to the offering even if they have no stated approach — I call it the lack of an approach. Again, I think you get my drift.

So, if you could boil down in an elevator pitch why people should put their hard earned money in the offering plate what would you say? The Influential Fundraiser says, "Every elevator pitch should have three elements: **think, feel and do.**"¹

The book states that in crafting your elevator pitch you need to prepare it in reverse order; by starting with what action you want your speech to ensure. In the case of the offering you want their gift. Next, you imagine the emotion or feeling in those people that will likely move them to give their offering. Finally, you select and then shape the information or data you feel will likely create that emotion and thus their response.

1 Bernard Ross and Clare Segal. *The Influential Fundraiser* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009) 19.

There might be other ways to structure the message but this should get you thinking. Hopefully these pages will cause you to think about a segment of the service that rarely gets thought or preparation, the offering. I can tell you one thing; the pastors that we work with have an elevator pitch. Maybe that is why their giving has increased. Do you have an elevator pitch?

When your elevator moment arrives what will you say? Guess what? Every Sunday you have an elevator moment, the offering. What you say could make the difference between making budget this year or laying off staff members and canceling ministry. You better get your elevator pitch on!

Make the offering time a thought-out part of the service; much the same as the sermon and other aspects of worship. A well planned offering appeal will result in maximized donations. Spend some time weekly thinking about new and creative ways to elevator pitch your offering times. Work hard to make the offering special and I think you will find your offering plates will be fuller!

Offering Basics

Before you launch into reading and using this paper let's spend a bit of time talking about the offering in general. Most churches have some form of an offering. In fact churches are the envy of the non-profit world because once a week we get to have face time with our top donors. Some charities never even see their donors much less have a giving moment pass them by every week. You have an incredible opportunity each week to garner financial support from those that attend your services.

The movement had been in Contemporary churches to move the offering out of the service and to some portal that members had to find like baskets or something else. I am finding that even among Contemporary churches there is a move back toward the old fashioned pass the plate concept of the offering. I really don't think it matters if you have fancy offering plates or buckets from Kentucky Fried Chicken. I do know that passing something in front of every person in attendance will garner you more funds than if your donors have to hunt for the offering box.

The Right and Wrong Way to Take Up the Offering

Taking the offering up is a lot like fixing breakfast. Nearly anyone can fix breakfast. From my standpoint it is pretty hard to mess up the offering. Most churches do a fair job with the offering. However, it has become so standard and routine that we rarely, if ever, give any thought to it. The biggest mistake that most churches make is to take the offering for granted and never put any thought into to how it is done. This book is an attempt to address that. My goal is for your offerings to be less boring and more exciting.

Guilt Never Works!

There are some things that can and will torpedo your offering. Perhaps the worst is utilizing guilt as a means to increase the amount you take up in the offering.

“We have not found anyone who loves the Lord enough to help us in our children’s area.” That comment was recently made at a Bible study that my wife attends. I want to believe that the lady who said that regretted saying it later. I hope so at any rate. She may have been frustrated in her lack of recruiting anyone. The situation might be dire in terms of volunteers. Still, the comment was one of guilt. That kind of comment never gets the right response. Even if someone does respond it all too often is for the wrong reasons and ultimately no one wins.

I find that we in the church world use guilt all the time. It is amazing that we celebrate and sing about grace and then turn right around and try to guilt people into serving or giving. When it comes to the offering guilt is the wrong method to use to increase your giving. While preaching a guilt laden sermon might increase the offering that Sunday those who struggle with giving will not make long term changes in how they approach stewardship. They will either forget what you said or worse, leave your church for somewhere else. The same is true if your offering appeal is laced with messages of guilt.

I believe that churches do not talk too much about money. I believe they don’t talk about it enough! When they do they often do so utilizing guilt. It is not the frequency with which you talk about money it is how you talk about it that sets off people. Too much preaching on the topic, when we preach on it at all, is guilt laden. No wonder people are resentful. Let me illustrate.

I have been married to my high school sweetheart for 40 plus years. When I do things for her out of love it is a joy. When I do things because I feel guilty or compelled I feel trapped and resentful. I just go through the motions and it is not an act of love. There is no joy in it. It is a burden and is wearisome. To be fulfilled in marriage you have to come to the point that everything you do for your spouse is done because you love them. Then there is never resentment or conflict. The same is true in our Christian life.

Guilt puts burdens on people’s backs. Love puts a passion in people’s hearts. When I serve or give out of guilt it’s a burden on my back that weighs me down. I will quit, stop giving or move on. When it is something in my heart then there is no weight but joy in serving and giving. When that happens I will continue to serve and give over and over, again and again. This should be our goal not only for us but for our church.

Honestly evaluate how you are motivating people to give and serve. Are you guilty of guilt? Look over the notes of your last sermon on giving. Was it based upon grace or law? Think back on the offering times in the last few services. Was guilt used to attempt to get people to give? Guilt is the work of the flesh. We need people to serve and give. We simply need them to do so for the right reasons. Not because WE made them feel guilty.

The goal of this paper is to give you positive messages that will result in joyful giving. While the messages may challenge those listening to evaluate what they are giving we never use guilt. Avoid playing the guilt card at all costs.

Placement Of The Offering

Does it matter where in the service the offering is placed? You might hear some argue one place or the other but frankly I don't think it matters all that much. I do think, and this is simply an opinion, that keeping it in the same place every week leads to routine and boredom. One thing I am trying to do with this book is break you out of your routine. While it probably does not matter where you put it there are certainly times when the message of the day or the theme of the day might mean you move the placement of the offering.

Along with the placement of the offering the question that might come up is what to do during the time the plates are being passed. Traditional churches tend to have the choir sing at the offering time or at least some music played. Other churches use a more creative touch by playing videos that deal with giving. I think this issue is up to you and the culture of your church. I would encourage you to think and pray through how to make the entire offering time meaningful, effective and most of all worshipful. So with that as a background let's get started at elevator pitching your offerings!

Does Fido Get More Than God?

Last year Americans spent \$48 billion on their pets — more than the gross domestic product of all but 64 countries in the world. That's double the amount shelled out on pets a decade ago. It is estimated that this year the amount spent on pets will go over the \$50 billion mark. The total annual percentage of money spent on pets in the U.S. is 1.4 percent. This comes out to an average of \$690 a year spent on pets per household.

Consider that the median amount of money given by the U.S. Christian to a church each year is \$200. That translates out to about 0.62 percent of their income. After hearing this it makes you wonder if Fido is not getting more than God. What does it say about what we truly value?

We love pets around here. In fact we all have pets. Yet hearing statistics like this does make you wonder where our priorities are. Having a pet is a wonderful thing but should what you spend on pets be more than what you give to God?

Paul admonished the Corinthians by saying, "But just as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us – see that you excel in this grace of giving." (II Corinthians 8:7) This morning as our ushers come forward to collect the offering I want to challenge you to excel in your giving.

While we certainly want you to love and care for Fido, at the same time we want you to be even more concerned about the Kingdom of God. What does your giving say about what you value? Today is a great day to show your love for Christ with a gift to His church.

The Widow's Mite

We know nothing about her except that she was a poor widow. And yet this unnamed woman caught the attention of Jesus and was immortalized as a result of her generous giving. Listen to the story as it is recorded in Luke 21:1-4,

“As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. ² He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. ³ “Truly I tell you,” he said, “this poor widow has put in more than all the others. ⁴ All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”

What a far cry from this woman is the typical American giver. We who have so much give less than two percent of our income to God's work. Interestingly enough we give less now than we did during The Great Depression. The medium gift in America to the church is \$200 a year! Most Americans spend more on their cell phones per month!

What we need in our churches today are more people who will give in the example of the widow in Luke. We need people who will be New Testament givers. It is not so much the amount that you give but the willing sacrifice behind the gift. While we don't know anything about this widow she has gone down in history as one of the greatest givers of all time.

Today, as our ushers come for the morning offering, think about your gift. If Jesus was sitting and observing our offering today what would He say about your gift? By the way, He is here and He is observing what you give. So, let's give a gift that would please and honor Him.

There Are No Atheist Hospitals

From time to time people complain that all the church talks about is money. It is true that every week we give our members and attendees an opportunity to give. As our ushers come forward this morning I want to ask you a simple question, how many atheist hospitals have you seen? I don't know about you but I have never driven by Atheist Hospital. However, I have driven by scores of Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian and even Catholic hospitals. Who do you think gave the money to start those hospitals? Christians like you and I gave that money once upon a time.

While we here at <name of your church> are not planning to start a hospital any time soon I want to assure you that your gift today will be used for good causes. Consider that a portion of your gift goes to ...

- List percentage or amounts your church gives to missions
- List local aide work and social services you provide
- List any other positive things funded by gifts donated to the church

So while you might never drive by <Your Church Name Hospital> your gift today is needed and helpful in extending the Kingdom of God. Every gift matters and will be used responsibly and strategically to extend the love of Jesus around the world.

Today, by your gift, you are making an investment into the future for the Kingdom. Let's pray.

What's Love Got To Do With It?

Anna Mae Bullock grew up in Nutbush, Tennessee yet her music would shape a generation of rockers. After a stormy relationship with her husband she launched her own music career and has become known as the grandmother of Rock and Roll. In the mid 80s she released a block buster hit entitled, *What's Love Got To Do With It?* Apparently for Anna, now known as Tina Turner, love means nothing as she has gone through one relationship after another and based her success partly on sex and suggestion.

Perhaps I should not be so hard on Tina. She isn't any more off about love than any other singer be it rock, rag, rap or country. Our airwaves are flooded with songs about love. Our bookshelves are filled with books about love and romance and yet it seems that so few know what love is really all about.

Tina Turner asked the question, "What's Love Got To Do With It?" The answer is everything. One way we show our love for others is by what we give. Paul wrote of the Macedonian church that they gave an offering,

"In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³ For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴ they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. ⁵ And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. ⁶ So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. ⁷ But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you[a]—see that you also excel in this grace of giving." II Corinthians 8:1-7

Love is not just something we say, it is something we do. This morning as our ushers come forward we have an opportunity to show our love for God through what we give. What does your gift today say about your love of Christ? Let's excel in the grace of giving this morning!

Where to Get the Best Investment

Today people are always looking to put their money where it will have the greatest return. I know a place where you can put your money and see a return that will outlive you and your children in its effectiveness. That place is right here at <Your Church Name.>

The local church? That's right; by giving through your local church you can see your money make incredible returns. Who says so? None other than God himself. Listen to what the Lord says in Malachi 3:10,

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.”

So how does giving your money to the church bring returns for you? For one thing it allows you to give to the work of the Lord around the world. A part of every dollar you give to our church is passed on to our state convention and national convention for missions and ministry. That ministry literally takes place around the world feeding the poor, providing for the homeless and preaching the Gospel. You become a partner in spreading the Good News.

For another thing your gift allows us as a church to minister to our community. You become a partner in seeing children accept Christ through Awana or Vacation Bible School. You become a partner in helping us minister to scores of people in Your town or City. Your gift allows us to continue the ministries of this church. Just think of how many of those ministries have benefitted you personally during the time you have been a member.

Besides the return your money has on the changed lives of others, through ministry you have the joy of obeying God's command. As we obey all of God's counsel there is tremendous personal reward in our lives. Obedience frees us from guilt and condemnation to be effective disciples for Christ.

So, I am asking you to consider making a gift this morning to your church; by doing so we all as members will benefit. A lost and dying world will benefit. Finally, you personally will benefit as God begins bringing blessings to your life. Hey, it's a return that is eternal. Where else can you get a deal like that?

When Did Your Congressman Last Visit You?

Ready or not it is campaign season. Just about the time we get one political campaign finished we find ourselves in the midst of another one. If you are like me, about the only time I ever hear from my Congressman is when he or she wants either my vote or my money. So when the phone rings tonight at your house it is probably an automated message asking for support for some politician.

Let me ask you a question. When you were last sick or in the hospital did your Congressman pay you a visit? Did he or she call or even send a card. No? Congressmen don't typically visit the sick and bereaved unless they are related to them or they are big donors. When crisis hits your family it is not a politician that comes to visit you, it is a pastor.

People complain from time to time about churches asking for money. They erroneously think that is all we talk about. To be fair we do take up a weekly offering here as we are preparing to do so once again. I will admit to you that a portion of what you give today goes to pay our staff and support staff's salaries and benefits. We don't apologize for that. The Scripture teaches in I Timothy 5:17, 18, "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages."

Our pastors spend countless hours visiting hospitals, performing funerals, visiting the bereaved, counseling and ministering to our needs. Our support staff works hard to make our church run smoothly and effectively. None of them ever looks to make sure you are a giver before they launch out the door to meet you at the point of your need. They do so willingly and gladly.

So as our ushers come forward this morning to take up the offering, think about all our staff does to enrich our lives week after week. They, more than your Congressman or any politician, are there for us when we need them. They truly are worthy of their wages. Let's give a gift today to show our sense of gratitude for all they do for us.

Is Your Credit Card Interest More Than You Give?

The typical American family pays over \$1,200 dollars a year in interest on their credit cards. That is not on principle it is simply the amount they pay in interest. Have you ever sat at a Starbucks and watched how few pay for their drink with cash? The same is true for when you go to the movies or out to eat. Using our plastic has become a way of life. Don't have money to pay for that meal? Just charge it! We have been raised almost from infancy with that mindset. As a result we pay thousands of dollars a year simply in interest!

Can you imagine that amount multiplied millions of times over? It is staggering to think what we pay to have something right now instead of waiting until we can save enough to afford it. What has resulted is that we have become a debtor nation struggling to make ends meet but still living high by pulling out our credit cards to purchase something else we want. We seldom ever save for anything and as a result pay many times more than the price of our purchase when you add in the interest.

Did you know the Bible teaches us to set aside money so we can give? Listen to Paul's instructions in I Corinthians 16:1-2 where he writes, "Now about the collection for the Lord's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made." Paul did not want to have to take up the collection when he came. He wanted it ready to be sent to those in need.

As our ushers come forward this morning are you ready to give? Have you set aside in your budget a gift back to God for His blessings in your life? Are you giving more to God's work than you are paying in interest? What does our spending habits say about what is really important in our lives? Show me someone's calendar and their bank account and I will show you what they really value. What do you value? With this morning's offering we each have another opportunity to show what is really important to us. Let's show what is truly important to us with a generous gift to the offering.

Living In a Material World

The rock star Madonna sang the hit song *Material Girl* a few years back. Most people know the words to the chorus where she sings, “Living in a material world and I am a material girl. You know that we are living in a material world and I am a material girl.” You may know the chorus but you probably don’t know the first few lines of the song. Madonna basically says that what matters to her is how much money a guy has. She says, “They can beg and they can plead but they can’t see the light, that’s right ‘Cause the boy with the cold hard cash is always Mister Right, ‘Cause we are living in a material world and I am a material girl.”

Madonna may have spoken the words that convey the heart of many in our materialistic society but her words are far from the words of Jesus. In Luke 12:22–31 Jesus says,

²² “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. ²³ For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. ²⁴ Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! ²⁵ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? ²⁶ Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?”

²⁷ “Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ²⁸ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you— you of little faith! ²⁹ And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. ³⁰ For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.”

Jesus is saying that we should not worry about the materialistic things of the world. Our focus should be on seeking Christ’s Kingdom. When we seek the Lord one of the promises is that God will take care of the rest. I don’t know about you but I am going to put my trust in the words of Christ rather than the words of a rock star. Long after Madonna is gone and her song forgotten the words of Jesus will still be giving us direction in how to live life to its fullest.

This morning as our ushers come forward let’s seek His Kingdom with a worthy gift.

