

The
Stewardship
JOURNAL
February 22, 2021

**From the Desk of Our
Executive Director**

**The Tithe: Cornerstone
of a Generous Life**

**Developing the Digital
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**Is Your Church Website
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Three Reasons Why

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From the desk of our Executive Director

Are we preaching to the choir? You might think so with our lead article this week entitled, "**The Tithe: Cornerstone of a Generous Life.**" We asked Randy Shipman, pastor of FBC Clinton, to write a defense of tithing for this issue of *The Stewardship Journal*. Our goal was not to convince *you* of the tithe's biblical importance but to give you ammunition for those claiming tithing is an Old Testament concept that we as Christians need no longer obey. Randy does a great job of giving us a much-needed biblical perspective. Pastor, this article belongs in your file cabinet for the next time you preach a sermon on tithing! Thanks, Randy, for giving us a great resource.

And the survey says... Help us help you by taking a short survey about *The Stewardship Journal*. We are sending the survey to you as a separate email on March 2nd. We want to know your thoughts, hear your views, and listen to your suggestions on making the *Journal* even more effective for you. Watch for the email next Tuesday.

If you have a story you feel would add value and encourage others, reach out to Rob Phillips at rphillips@mobaptist.org.

Now, here is a preview of what else you can expect in the pages that follow:

Mark Brooks, The Stewardship Coach, continues his series on the various "lanes" a church needs to build for a successful stewardship platform. Mark's post this week is entitled, ***Developing The Digital Giving Strategy***. In this week's post, Mark shares how to use your webpage and your online giving portal to increase giving.

Is Your Church Website Giver Friendly? That is the title of this week's Bonus Section, which gives you some recommendations that can and will improve your website's success.

Offering Talk – Did your kids ever drive you crazy asking "why" all the time? This week's talk, entitled "**Three Reasons Why,**" answers the why-give question. It's a great teaching talk reminding us of the biblical reasons why we give.

We would love to know how *The Stewardship Journal* is helping you increase stewardship at your church. Let's share our testimonies of what God is accomplishing in stewardship to encourage one another!

Advancing the Gospel!



Dr. John Yeats

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The Tithe: Cornerstone of a Generous Life

Randy Shipman, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Clinton MO

I was introduced to tithing early in my Christian life. I came to faith in a small country church served by a deeply committed bi-vocational pastor. Much of his teaching emphasized obedience under the Lordship of Jesus. I often heard him say, "Being baptized is the first act of obedience for believers." It was not uncommon for him to say, "The second act of obedience is tithing." He spoke these words over me the day I made my profession of faith in Jesus: "Randy is declaring his faith in Jesus and will follow the Lord in believer's baptism, the first act of obedience, and begin tithing, the second act of obedience." So, the day I accepted Jesus, I became a tither. However, the study of Scripture has confirmed and solidified my commitment to give the tithe and more.

The tithe is the cornerstone of a generous life; therefore, every believer should consider the tithe for three reasons.

The Old Testament tithe, a tenth, was primarily produce, which was offered in worship at the sanctuary. The one who offered the tithe ate a portion, as did the priest. The New Testament does not include tithing in the grace of giving. However, Jesus recognized the validity of the tithe while calling the Pharisees to move beyond the requirement of the Law to person-centered giving: "But woe to you Pharisees! You give a tenth of mint, rue, and every kind of herb, and you bypass justice and love for God. These things you should have done without neglecting the others" (Luke 11:42, CSB).

1. The tithe is a practical response to material blessings.

Two passages in the Old Testament illustrate this. The first tithing story of the Bible is in Genesis 14. Abram's encounter with Melchizedek included a blessing (19-20a) and a response, "And Abram gave him a tenth of everything" (20b, CSB). The author of Hebrews used the story of Abraham's tithe as evidence of the superiority of Jesus over the priesthood of Levi (Heb. 7).

Another example was when Jacob had a dream at Bethel (Gen 28:10-22) in which God pronounced a blessing, extending the covenant with Abraham and Isaac to Jacob and his descendants (Gen 28:13-15). The giving of the tithe for Jacob was an act of worship.

An important point here is that Abram's and Jacob's giving of the tithe predated the Law and provided a foundational stewardship principle. Giving the tithe should be considered a basic response to God's blessings for those desiring a generous life.

2. The tithe is a tangible expression of worship.

The giving of the tithe was often set in the context of worship. Leviticus ends with instructions regarding vows, which seem to be beyond the required sacrifices and reflect a willing devotion to the Lord. The tithe is specifically included in these special vows:

¹³⁰Every tenth of the land's produce, grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD (Lev 27:30, CSB).

The special vows address motive. In them, the individual goes beyond the Law's requirement to express his or her devotion to the Lord.

Moses gave specific instructions about worship in "the place the LORD your God chooses" (Deut 12:5, CSB). Moses wrote: "You are to bring there your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tenths and personal contributions, your vow offerings and freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks" (Deut 12:6, 11, CSB). The tithe and other offerings were elements of worship in which families rejoiced because of God's blessings.

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The Tithe: Cornerstone of a Generous Life

To think of the tithe as an Old Testament requirement is to miss its powerful place in worship. The tithe seems to have been more than a rule, and it was a method of acknowledging God's provision in a declaration of praise and worship. Giving the tithe should be considered an act of worship for those desiring a generous life.

3. The tithe is a functional element in spiritual renewal.

The tithe played a role in the spiritual renewal by Hezekiah, Nehemiah, and Malachi. This pattern cannot be overlooked as one seeks spiritual renewal today.

When Hezekiah removed idolatry and reestablished the worship of God, God blessed the people. As the leader, Hezekiah set the tone, "The king contributed from his own possessions" (2 Chron 31:3a, CSB). The people responded "liberally of the best of the grain, new wine, fresh oil, honey, and of all the produce of the field, and they brought in an abundance, a tenth of everything" (2 Chron 31:5, CSB). The people's generous response resulted in an abundant supply "left over" (2 Chron 31:10, CSB), which met the Levites' and their families' needs.

In the time of Nehemiah, the Law was read, people confessed their sin, worshiped the Lord, and made a binding agreement (Neh 9). An element of the vow was the restoration of the tithe. The tithe of the tithe was for the care of the Levites and was brought to "the storerooms of the treasury in the house of our God" (Neh 10:38b, CSB).

Malachi's challenge to the Israelites is perhaps the most familiar of the tithing texts (Mal 3:7-12). It was a call for Israel to repent of their sloppy stewardship. They were admonished:

"Bring the full tenth into the storehouse so that there may be food in my house. Test me in this way," says the Lord of Armies. "See if I will not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing for you without measure" (Mal 3:10, CSB).

The Lord offers spiritual renewal and abundant blessings to Israel if they repent. The tithe is the symbol of their repentance and an indicator of their commitment to return to the Lord. Giving the tithe should be considered a functional element in spiritual renewal for those desiring a generous life.

A small group of deacons in a church I served became concerned about their church's spiritual vitality. They privately committed themselves to read the Bible daily, attend worship weekly, and give a double tithe for thirty days. The wind of the Spirit began to move in the church. After thirty days, they shared their commitment with the remainder of the deacons and invited them to take the thirty-day challenge. They did, and the wind of the Spirit grew stronger. Sixty days into their commitment, they shared the story with the church staff and invited us to join them for thirty days. We did, and the wind of the Spirit was a gale. Ninety days after three men decided to "prove" God, the whole church was challenged to join the movement, and the wind of the Spirit virtually doubled the church, stabilized the finances, and enlarged our missional influence during the next two years.

Tithing is the cornerstone of a generous life. It is a practical response to material blessings, a tangible expression of worship, and a functional element in spiritual renewal. Every believer should consider the strong biblical basis for the tithe and take God's challenge through Malachi.

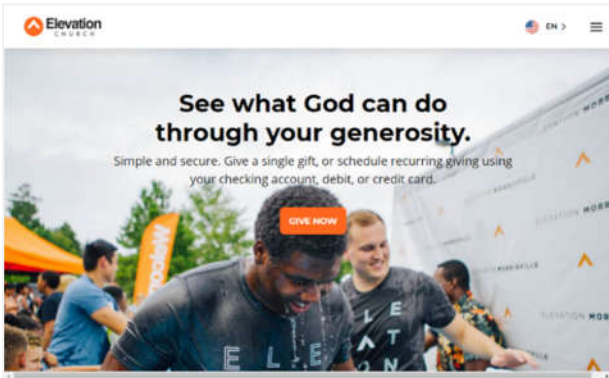
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Current Events and Relevant Thoughts From:

The Stewardship Coach

Mark Brooks

Developing The Digital Giving Strategy



"The Future of Giving? It Ain't Paper!" That was the title of a talk I gave in 2013 at the National Association of Christian Business Administrators convention. 2020 showed how prophetic I was as, almost overnight, the majority of your giving came in some digital form.

As a result of this flip in giving, I think we all see the value and the need of developing a digital giving strategy. As we continue to think through the lanes needed to build out your stewardship plan, I want to focus today on the Digital Lane in this Coach, entitled *Developing The Digital Giving Strategy*.

A few years ago, about all a church needed in their Digital Lane was a website. Those days are long gone. Your website is crucial. In fact, I am going to spend this entire issue talking about website strategies. The Digital Lane is now more complex so I will break this lane down into two Coaches. First, in this issue, I will deal with website and online giving platform basics. Next week I'll deal with social media, a key part of your Digital Lane. Let's start with your website.

10 seconds or less. That's how long you have to engage people who land on your church webpage. If you want to communicate in this day and age, you need an online presence, and that starts with a great website. If your site doesn't quickly grab people's attention, they will leave and probably never come back. So, you have one chance to make an impression. What impression do your sites make? With that page as a backdrop of how to build your page right, let's dive into what I call ...

Church Website Basics – Here are some basics you need to think about for your website.

You need to think of your website as your home base. It is not the only source of information, but it should be the key source of information. A website is a guest's first impression of your church. So, make it a good one. Your website is also your base for collecting the digital offering. **Websites and Social Media are today's Yellow Pages!** Before people ever enter your parking lot, or watch your live stream, they first visit your website.

The two tracks of a church website. Your website must be designed for two target audiences: searchers, and members. Most church websites are designed with members in mind rather than searchers. As such, they fail to connect with those that are looking for a church.

Your website should tell your story but not be only about you! The Church has an amazing story that we too infrequently focus upon. Young donors want to know that their gift matters, so talk about what giving to your church accomplishes. The picture above from Elevation Church's giving page always tells a story connecting giving to life change.

Make sure your website is mobile friendly. 81% of Americans have a smartphone! If your website is not accessible by smartphones or tablets, you are missing out on connecting with potential attendees and donors. If you don't know if your website is mobile friendly, try accessing your church site on your smartphone and tablet.

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Developing The Digital Giving Strategy

Less is more. One final point is that with people giving you ten seconds or less of viewing before they leave your page, you had better clean up the mess. One of the biggest mistakes of church websites is trying to put too much information on the page. A great example of less is more is found at my client, Cross Church's, site. Be sure to look at their mobile look also. Find their site here <http://crosschurch.com/>.

The importance of curb appeal - As a pastor, I once had an architect come inspect our buildings and give us his recommendation. He stated that our dated buildings did not communicate how up to date we were in our programming and interior facilities. In short, he recommended we update our curb appeal. Curb appeal is what gets people in the door. After that it is up to you. Your website should have curb appeal. One way to assure your site has good curb appeal is to keep it up to date. Out-dated information is one of the biggest mistakes I find on church websites. Does that matter?

75% of Young Donors Turned Off by Out-of-Date Web Sites.² That was the headline of an article in *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*. The article was reporting on a study that tracked Millennial behaviors in giving, then in service, and in communication. Its findings are revealing not simply for charities but for the Church. Since Millennials are our next generation of leaders, we in the Church had better pay attention on how to connect with them and how to get their donations.

Make the landing page of your online giving easy to use and impactful. COVID-19 taught us the importance of digital giving. I stress the importance of making giving quick and easy. The easier you make it for people to give, the more apt they are to give. I posted a picture of Elevation Church's landing page in this issue. Check it out for yourself at <https://elevationchurch.org/giving/>.

I'm not a prophet but I was accurate when I entitled my 2013 talk *The Future of Giving? It Ain't Paper!* Yet, time and COVID have proven me correct. While we might return to some of our ways post-COVID, digital giving is here to stay and the future of giving is not going to be paper. It's past time to develop your digital giving strategy for your Digital Lane.

Next week we will talk about the social media side of your Digital Lane.



Mark Brooks – The Stewardship Coach
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Get ready for your most successful Easter offering ever with my playbook, the 2021 *Successful Easter Giving Plan*. I provide you all the tools you will need to make this Easter's offering a huge success. I have done all the work for you. You can download your copy of the *Successful Easter Giving Plan* at <https://acts17generosity.com/shop/successful-easter-giving-plan/>.



1. <https://techjury.net/blog/smartphone-usage-statistics/>
 2. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/young-donors-are-turned-off-by-out-of-date-uninformative-web-sites/>
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Bonus Material

Is Your Church Website Giver Friendly?

Here are some recommendations that can and will improve the success of your website. These recommendations can be implemented in your church whether you run 100 on a Sunday or 10,000.

First, let's learn from **Top Mistakes of Websites** – You want to do the opposite of what I list here.

- ✓ **Too much clutter.** This is the number one mistake I find on church sites. Less is better. Think Google!
- ✓ **Not mobile-friendly.** How does your site look on a cell phone? How easy is it to read and navigate?
- ✓ **It's all about the church with little said to the person visiting the site.** Design your landing page for guests, not members.
- ✓ **It looks like a Sunday bulletin.** That might be great for your members, but it will not gain you visitors.
- ✓ **Saying too much.** This adds to the clutter. Think brief short statements and paragraphs.
- ✓ **Outdated stuff.** Your website needs to be a work in continual progress.
- ✓ **Failing to optimize pages for search engines.** If you are not on the first page of a search engine, it is doubtful that anyone will find your site to click on it. Pay attention to what is called Search Engine Optimization, SEO.
- ✓ **Hiding the giving button.** If people must hunt and look for your giving page, it's unlikely that they will give.

When it comes to your giving page, here are some of my basic recommendations...

- ✓ Put your most important information at the top of the page.
 - ✓ The page must be easy to understand and use.
 - ✓ Show what you are doing to reinforce how important giving is.
 - ✓ Think mobile. Take your smartphone and check out your site now to see how it looks.
 - ✓ Change the format regularly.
 - ✓ Provide multiple digital options for how people can give!
 - ✓ Work to drive people to the site! We will talk more about this next week.
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Missions and Ministry Moment: Setting Up Your Offering

Every week we provide what are called offering talks. We have found that the easiest way to see an increase in giving is to improve how you approach the offering time. Instead of telling people they don't have to give, we like to show them what giving to a church accomplishes. By showing people your mission and ministry focus, you will create a desire in your attendees to *want* to give to support that life change. That's why we call them Missions and Ministry Moments.

You can read them exactly how we write them, or use them as idea starters for how the message would fit your culture and context. Our goal is to develop lifetime stewards, but we must get the first gift to begin them on the journey. Here is this week's offering talk.

Three Reasons Why

Why? Have you ever heard that from one of your kids when you ask them to do something or tell them they can't do something they want to do? Sometimes they keep on saying, "But why?" Have you ever responded out of frustration, "Just because"? How did that work for you? Probably not too well. We naturally want to know why.

This morning, as we prepare to take up our offering, I want to ask the questions that might be in your mind: Why? Why do we take time each week for the offering? Let me share with you three reasons why.

First, we take up the offering out of obedience. As disciples of Christ, we are admonished to give, and give freely. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth, "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."

Second, we take up the offering as a means of worship. We don't stop worshiping when we collect the offering. We continue to worship. Your gift is an expression of your gratitude for what God has provided for you. We should think of every offering as a chance to worship God.

Third, we take up the offering because what we do as a church matters and is worthy of your financial support. We don't apologize here when we ask people to give. Your gifts and the gifts of others help us do amazing, life-changing things here. When you give to our Church, you are helping us extend God's Kingdom here in our town and area!

So, the next time someone complains about the Church always asking for money, you can tell them why we ask for money! Let's give this morning out of obedience. Let's give this morning to worship God who sustains us and provides for us. Let's give this morning because we ARE making a difference.
