

The Stewardship JOURNAL

March 1, 2021

**From the Desk of Our
Executive Director**

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March Madness?

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From the Desk of Our Executive Director

Is giving increasing or declining? Both. I explain how that is possible in my monthly post. I share the findings of two reports that appear to present conflicting results. The key is in understanding the two sides of the giving coin. I'll explain how both can be true.

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

Can you raise funds through social media? Mark Brooks, The Stewardship Coach, answers this question for us as he continues his series on the various "lanes" a church needs to build for a successful stewardship platform. Mark's post this week is entitled, ***Using Social Media to Enhance Your Digital Lane***. You will find some practical advice that you can use immediately.

Our **Bonus Section** gives you a checklist entitled, ***The Digital Lane Social Media Checklist and Suggested Action List***. It has great advice and tips on using your social media to increase giving and givers.

Offering Talk – At every offering time, it is essential to connect your vision to the offering. Showing people how a dollar given at your church makes an eternal difference is key toward seeing people begin their generosity journey. Each week we supply you with a talk to help you achieve this. This week's talk is entitled, ***March Madness?***

Please watch for our survey to be emailed to you this Thursday. We want to continue to improve The Stewardship Journal. Please respond with your comments and suggestions. If you have questions or problems with the survey, reach out to Rob Phillips at rphillips@mobaptist.org.

Advancing the Gospel!



Dr. John Yeats

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Missionary Musings: The Two Sides of the Giving Coin

Dr. John L. Yeats, Executive Director

Americans gave more during The Great Depression than they do today. In 1933, the worst year of the Depression, Americans gave 3.2% of their Disposable Personal Income (DPI) to the church. Fast forward to 2018, and Americans now only give 2.05%.¹ These are the findings in the recently released 30th edition of *The State of Church Giving through 2018*.

Every year, an organization called *empty tomb, inc.* puts out what is perhaps the most detailed look at giving in America. The volume of research is why the report is always a look back rather than a current look. While looking at data earlier in the twentieth century, their report primarily spans the years starting at 1968 moving forward. This comprehensive look at giving allows the authors, John and Sylvia Ronsvalle, to project trends and patterns in American giving.

Here are some interesting facts from the report on which I have been reflecting:

- 71% of 2018 charitable giving went to churches.
- From 1968 to 2018, total contribution to the church increased 81%.
- DPI increased during this period by 167%. Americans made more but gave less!
- By 2018, U.S. per capita DPI had increased 726% since 1933.
- By 2018, per member giving had increased 425% since 1933.

Those are just a few of the massive amounts of data the study produces. I am still working through this data, but let me share some observations that I feel are lessons for us in church leadership.

Giving to the church is undergoing a slow, steady decline that began long before COVID-19 appeared. At the same time, there have been a few years since 1968 where giving increased. However, for the majority of years, giving declined.

The data shows that total dollars increased while the percentage of what Americans gave declined. How do you account for that? Here is what the Ronsvalles wrote, "The fact that incomes increased faster than giving explains why per member giving increased in dollars overall from 1968 through 2018, but shrank as a portion of income."² With a continually aging donor base, the trend moving forward is thus alarming.

You may have seen reports that show giving on the rise. Indeed, what has surprised many experts is how giving rebounded during the second half of 2020. We have heard anecdotal evidence from churches that their giving went up. While any increase is a reason for rejoicing, it pays to drill deeper into the state of church giving. That leads me to the next observation.

To track present and future giving, we must see the two sides to the giving coin. Often what is reported about giving simply reflects the dollar amount given. Viewing charitable giving only by the number of dollars given is to view only one side of the coin. To project giving trends, you need to keep track of the total amount given and giving as a portion of income. Dr. Ronnie Floyd writes about this in his book, *Ten Percent: A Call to Biblical Stewardship*:

"You must think about giving from two perspectives, like two sides of a coin. One side reveals the percentage of the donor's income given. The other side reveals the amount in terms of actual dollar amounts given. So, while giving in terms of amounts has increased, giving as a percentage of income is declining.

"If you only look at one side of the coin, it has the potential to create a false sense of security about the financial health of the church. For many, this is what has happened. The decline is so slow that we can't recognize what is right in front of us."³

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Missionary Musings: The Two Sides of the Giving Coin

Why is there not more concern among church leaders? This leads to another observation...

We have been lulled to sleep by the smallness of each year's decline. What difference does a declining percentage of giving mean? Here is a quote from the study: "If the same portion of income had been donated in 2018, as was donated in 1968, aggregate Total Contributions would have been \$26.4 billion for these denominations, rather than the actual amount given of \$18.4 billion, a difference of \$8 billion, or an increase of 43%." ⁴

Even small fractional declines become significant multiplied a million times over. For instance, the Ronsvalle's report shows giving to Benevolences, a category they define as supporting the larger mission of a church, declined from 2017 to 2018 by 0.005770457%. That decline resulted in churches having \$51,755,641 *less* to spend in 2018 on the church's larger mission. ⁵

What should our response be to this decline? This slow erosion in the percentage of giving by Americans must be addressed. Southern Baptists have long taught the tithe's biblical directive, giving 10% of one's income to their local church. The passing of so many of our older members underscores the necessity of teaching the tithe as a means of reversing a decline in giving in our churches. Only through a consistent discipleship approach that teaches members how to be good stewards of what God has entrusted to them will we reverse these declines.

We also must continue to educate our members on the impact of their giving. Too often, we have failed to connect our vision to giving. Let me end with this final quote from the study that says, "A denomination that is able to involve its members in a larger vision, such as mission outreach, as evidenced in levels of giving support to support that idea, will also be attracting additional members." ⁷

Our mission is the Great Commission. As we focus upon reaching the lost in our towns, cities, counties, state, nation, and the world, I believe God's people will rally to support that mission. Now is the time to act. Our mission is too important *not* to be fully funded.

1. John and Sylvia Ronsvalle, *The State of Church Giving through 2018*. (Champaign: empty tomb, inc., 2021), 38.
2. Ibid, 10.
3. Floyd, Dr. Ronnie, *Ten Percent: A Call to Biblical Stewardship*. (Nashville: Baptist Press, 2020), 6.
4. John and Sylvia Ronsvalle, *The State of Church Giving through 2018*. (Champaign: empty tomb, inc., 2021), 17.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid, 52.
7. Ibid, 52-53.

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Current Events and Relevant Thoughts From:

The Stewardship Coach

Mark Brooks

Using Social Media to Enhance Your Digital Lane



“Twitter is the most narcissistic place in the world and a complete waste of time.” Those were the words the guy on the left, Shane Bishop, once said to me. That is Shane’s Twitter info on the left. In my opinion, no other pastor does a better job of connecting with people on social media than Shane Bishop. The guy that once blew off social media is today an example of how to *use* social media.

I am continuing my focus on building out the various Lanes we need in your stewardship platform. Last week, I introduced the Digital Lane and talked about website basics. I am going to continue sharing about the Digital Lane by this week writing on ***Using Social Media to Enhance Your Digital Lane***.

I must confess that I am a huge Shane Bishop fan. He is an interesting and fun guy. I have had the honor of working with Shane for well over a decade. A few days ago, I texted Shane asking for a quote on the value of social media for a pastor. He gave me three quotes. I am going to share each quote and then give my thoughts on each. Here is the first:

“Social Media is to a pastor what a hammer is to a carpenter. It is an essential tool, but you can’t fall in love with it.”

Two observations. First, tools have specific intended functions. The same is true for social media. I once heard Justin Wise, the founder of Think Digital, say, **“Social Media is building and nurturing relationships online.”** This is what Shane Bishop uses social media to accomplish. He once said to me, **“I can engage with more people in an hour on Facebook than I can in a whole week of outside visits.”** Social media has allowed this pastor, of one of the fastest growing churches in America, to connect with more people than ever. How can you use the social media tool to help you build relationships?

My second observation is to confirm the danger of falling in love with the tool. Make sure that your working hours on social media are truly about ministry and connecting with people. Sitting in your office all day on Facebook means you have fallen in love with the tool. Just saying.

Here is the second quote from Shane Bishop:

“Social Media engagement for a pastor is walking on a razors edge...a necessary one but a razor’s edge none the less.”

Don’t get cut by this razor! Let me tell you how bad it is on social media right now. My friend and fellow seminarian, Dr. Ronnie Floyd, the President and CEO of the Southern Baptist Convention, recently appealed to the entire Convention to basically cool it on social media. My UMC clients have been after each other for years on social media. My African American clients are back and forth on CRT and yadda, yadda, yadda. I get that these are important issues but let’s not air our dirty laundry out in public right in front of the lost world we want to reach.

Your social media footprint will be checked by members, guests, and your enemies. If your reputation online ruins your ability to connect with people, you will never be able to use the Digital Lane effectively. That to me is the razor’s edge.

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Using Social Media to Enhance Your Digital Lane

Here is the third and final quote from Shane,

“Failing to utilize Social Media for the Gospel would be like Paul failing to utilize Roman transportation, Luther the printing press or Billy Graham television. It is an essential tool for our time.”

I wish I had said that! If you think he is over exaggerating, consider these stats...

- 4 billion people world-wide use social media.
- 95% of Internet users used social media or a messaging service in the past month.
- Facebook has 2.7 billion monthly active users.
- 2.5 hours a day is the average time spent on social media.¹

“Bam!” That’s a famous Shane Bishop reply. It was my reply back to him after his three quotes. Thanks Shane!

What does this have to do with increasing giving? Social media, in my mind, is all about engagement that leads to giving. It’s not about raising dollars, but raising awareness. It allows you to tell your story by showing your story. A compelling story is the best way to raise dollars. One of my key mantras for raising funds is:

Get a story, work your story, tell your story and people will give to support your story!



“Like this?” A few years ago, I was in a planning meeting with Dr. John Cross pictured here in sunglasses. I told him I had seen their FB post of beach baptisms. I told them how moved I was by their beach baptism pictures. I said, “You ought to use a picture with a link back to your giving page. Thank people for their supporting life change like that.” I continued to talk, when two minutes later, one of the staff turned his iPad around and showed me this picture with their giving link and said, “Like this?”

Yes! Social Media is the best place to tell your story. Your amazing work must be fully funded. Social media can help you tell that story, making it easier to make the connection of how a dollar given to your church goes to change lives for eternity. You have a story to tell and social media allows you to tell that story. Remember,

We live in a digital world so you *must* have a robust, compelling and effective Digital Lane!



Mark Brooks – The Stewardship Coach

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Find out how to access all of my playbooks at <https://acts17generosity.com/store/>.

1. <https://influencermarketinghub.com/social-media-benchmark-report-2021/>

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Bonus Material

The Digital Lane Social Media Checklist and Suggested Action List

Avoid these Common Mistakes Churches Make in Social Media

1. **Not utilizing it at all.** If you want to reach your neighborhood, you will find them on social media.
2. **Setting it up and then leaving it.** Posts that are weeks or months old show a lack of interest.
3. **Making it all about the church.** Don't use social media to replace your newsletter or bulletin.
4. **Lack of strategy.** Don't just show up on social media. Have a strategy. What is your goal?
5. **Lacking a plan to implement the strategy.** Without a plan, you are really planning to fail.

Key Pointers for Social Media Success - Here are some key pointers that will help you make your sites more effective.

- **Set it up!** - Use multiple social media platforms to get your message out. Multichannel is the new normal! Find out what platforms are used most predominantly by your members and guests. Don't try to be everywhere; be where your community is.
 - **Message it out!** What are you attempting to communicate? Stay on point! Don't dilute your message.
 - **Plan it out!** What are you trying to accomplish with each of your Social Media platforms? Write it down and work it! Link your social media posts with the calendar and flow of your church. Be creative!
 - **Determine the right number of posts.** While never posting anything is wrong, so is continually posting stuff to the point that it is annoying. At a minimum, consider a daily post.
 - **Drive people to your platform.** Make sure in all your communications you provide easy links to your social media sites. Then make your social media sites worth visiting!
 - **Engage with people.** Social Media strategies are different from web page strategies.
 - **Show and tell!** Social Media lets you show missions and ministry in action. Post lots of pictures! Make sure you have proper clearance for all persons used in your posts.
 - **Who owns it?** Make sure someone owns the plan. The best-laid plans are worthless unless someone owns it.
 - **Review it!** Assess what works and what doesn't. Good social media strategies are works in progress.
 - **Make the ask!** Show life change and periodically invite them to support that with a generous gift by providing a URL link to your giving page.
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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 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 fits 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.

March Madness?

Who is ready for March Madness? March Madness is a term that has become synonymous with the NCAA basketball tournament played every March. It comes from the fact that many games end in crazy maddening ways. There are also lots of upsets that add to the, well, madness.

I'm not sure the term March "Madness" is such a good idea this year! I don't know about you, but I have had enough madness. I am looking for some calmness.

All joking aside, our world needs to hear that there is hope that brings a calm from the madness of the world. That hope bringing calm comes through knowing Jesus. Sharing that with the world is our mission and purpose. Every time you give here, you help us fulfill that mission. So, thank you for your generosity. It is making a difference.

Let's continue to worship by bringing our offering now through one of the many giving options we provide.
