

The Stewardship JOURNAL

March 22, 2021

**From the Desk of Our
Executive Director**

Who Is Your Mary Gibbs?

**The Gratitude Lane: Using
the Power of Saying Thank You**

**Crafting a Thank You
Card or Letter**

Showers of Blessing

THE STEWARDSHIP JOURNAL

From the Desk of Our Executive Director

Dr. Ronnie Floyd commented in a Baptist Press release on March 5th about the decline in Cooperative Program giving. Dr. Floyd stated that one problem this revealed was that the Convention is "not providing churches with a concise and compelling Great Commission vision that will move them to support it." After stating that, his next sentence says, "However, to pastors and churches, help is on the way." To that, we say, Amen!

Help us better help you! *The Stewardship Journal* is one piece of the help we provide. However, we want to listen to your needs. We have created a survey for church leaders to learn more about how stewardship is going with your congregation and what resources would be most helpful to support you. Your opinions and experiences are crucial to help us serve you best. As a "thank you" for participating, you have an opportunity to be entered into a drawing to win a \$100 Amazon gift card. To take the survey, go to this link:

<https://www.research.net/r/S7WK9YN>

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

Do you have a will? That is a question Neil Franks, president of The Missouri Baptist Foundation, asks in his post, "**Who Is Your Mary Gibbs?**" Neil opens up with the story of Mrs. Mary Gibbs, whose \$25,000 bequest one hundred years ago is still bearing fruit today. The following quote sums up the article and the heart of all of us here. Neil wrote, "We want to share a *long-term* approach towards assuring your church's survival through estate planning. We want to help you cultivate the Mary Gibbs of your church." Let's find your Mary Gibbs.

Everyone loves a thank you now and then. Mark Brooks' post this week shows us how to use a simple thank you to build stewardship in his article entitled ***The Gratitude Lane: Using the Power of Saying Thank You.***

Our **Bonus Section** follows Mark's main post, giving us pointers and thoughts about crafting a thank you card or letter. It's a great checklist for how to improve your thank you letters and notes.

Offering Talk – This week's talk is entitled **Showers of Blessing**. With spring arriving, this talk gives a timely word on spiritual showers of blessing.

Remember to take the survey! We need your input. We look forward to hearing from you.

Advancing the Gospel!



Dr. John Yeats

THE STEWARDSHIP JOURNAL

Who Is Your Mary Gibbs?

Dr. Neil Franks, CEP, President & Treasurer, Missouri Baptist Foundation

In 1921, a faithful Baptist woman named Mary Gibbs died and left \$25,000 to Missouri Baptist causes, including an annual scholarship. Today, a hundred years since her death, that estate gift produces over \$3,000 a year. It did that last year, and it will do even more next year and every year after that until Jesus returns. Today and tomorrow, Mary Gibbs is funding life-changing ministry by providing scholarships to Missouri Baptist students. Who in your church could be your Mary Gibbs?

In the inaugural issue of *The Stewardship Journal*, our Executive Director, Dr. John Yeats, opened with this statistic from the Barna Group, "1 in 5 churches in America could close their doors due to the lockdowns in the next 18 months." That sobering statistic has everyone's attention. We believe this can be avoided *if* we take action.

The Stewardship Journal is one of our state convention's attempts to assure that no MBC church is in that number closing. The Journal's articles and posts are designed to provide *immediate* financial help for our churches. With this article, we want to share a *long-term* approach toward assuring your church's survival through estate planning. We want to help you cultivate the Mary Gibbs of your church.

Most are pointing to the pandemic as the reason that giving to the church is in decline. While the pandemic has and will continue to impact giving, that alone is not the real reason giving is declining. Before COVID reached our shores, the trends showed giving to the church has been in a steady decline for several years. One reason why is the aging of our primary donor base. The passing of our faithful donors is why you must start estate planning at your church.

Long before any of us ever heard of COVID, we were in a dual crisis of the most massive wealth transfer in human history. At the same time, we are experiencing the most significant decline in the sheer number of Evangelicals. As a result, attendance has declined, which also impacts giving. We are failing to convince the next generation to support the work of established institutional ministries; at precisely the same time, we are losing a generation who did. Every church thus needs a two-pronged approach to reversing our giving decline. On one end, we must teach stewardship, and on the other, we must encourage estate planning.

Estate planning is not something on the front burner of the vast majority of your church members. Consider that only 32% of Americans have a will, according to a 2020 survey. 68% of Americans are thus leaving their inheritance to chance. If only 32% of Americans have a will, what percentage of your church do you believe has a will? How can your church produce another Mary Gibbs without members having a will?

As a long-time pastor and now the Missouri Baptist Foundation president, I can present a unique perspective on finances. During my pastoral years, I saw our Lord do incredible things both spiritually and financially. At my last pastorate, First Branson, our weekly attendance tripled, and our annual budget more than doubled. We built a \$2.7 million community center and paid it off in less than three years. Not only did we expand ministry, but we finished in the black every year while seeing almost double-digit budget growth annually, all while increasing our mission giving by three-fold.

THE STEWARDSHIP JOURNAL

Who Is Your Mary Gibbs?

My experiences working in the local church, and now heading up our Baptist Foundation, have shown me the importance of a fully developed stewardship plan. I have learned that it is not enough to grow your budget annually if you do not, at the same time, have a long-term plan for providing for your church financially. The Missouri Baptist Foundation exists in part to help you achieve long-term financial stability through estate planning.

What is keeping us from seeing more Mary Gibbs? Sadly, it is often a lack of leadership from the ministerial staff of a church. Here is a probing question: Do you have a will? Does your staff? Before we can lead our congregation in estate planning, we must lead by example. The road to long-term financial stability starts with you.

To assure that your church is not one of those closings Barna is predicting, we must lead our members to a new level of Christian living lacking in the church today. A place where the Jesus follower no longer views his money as his own, but rather a gift from God. We must lead our members to experience the joy of serving the Lord by building a financial plan whose purpose is to utilize the wealth God has granted them to advance the cause of Christ. In short, we need more Mrs. Gibbs.

The Missouri Baptist Foundation stands ready to start your church toward financial stability. It starts with you. Contact us today and let us show you how *you* can become another Mrs. Gibbs.

Dr. Neil Franks, CEP, is President of the Missouri Baptist Foundation. As part of their mission, they provide "Possibility Planning" services for people. They help individuals strategize how to use their resources wisely. They walk alongside clients to help navigate the world of Powers of Attorney, Wills, Trusts, and other tools to accomplish your goals. You can download his new book, *A Family and Kingdom Plan*, from [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or contact his office at nfranks@mbfn.org. He is available for seminars, sermons, and individual consultations at no cost or obligation.

THE STEWARDSHIP JOURNAL

Current Events and Relevant Thoughts From:

The Stewardship Coach

Mark Brooks

The Gratitude Lane: Using the Power of Saying Thank You



"How much did you give this organization?" That was my response a few years ago when my wife showed me the glossy pictures a charity had sent her. My wife supports a charity called Smile Train. They do corrective surgery for children with cleft lips in third world countries. She was showing me before and after pictures of smiling kids.

The upshot of the note was saying, **"Because of your generosity these babies now have a chance at life."** That was when I started paying attention to how non-profits show thanks and gratitude to their donors. We had not given that much but you would have thought our gift kept Smile Train going. My wife felt affirmed for her gift and encouraged by the difference it made. She continues to give to Smile Train.

How do you thank your donors? The typical church does a horrible job of expressing thanks to their donors. That is a mistake. I'm going to help you avoid this mistake with this edition of the Coach, entitled ***The Gratitude Lane: Using the Power of Saying Thank You.*** I'm going to show you how establishing a Gratitude Lane will lead to an increase in giving and givers. Let's start by looking at why you need a Gratitude Lane.

First, it shows you value the donor's gift and that they are not simply another number. Few people ever show true gratitude. Do you say thank you enough when it comes to your donors? Saying thank you is one of the biggest overlooked needs for churches. Too many have the attitude that saying thank you to donors is wrong. Here is a real-life example.

Several years ago, a pastor asked me to write for him various letters on giving. As I met with him, I remarked that in their recent stewardship campaign they never sent out a thank you letter to those who committed to the campaign. The pastor said, "I think it is inappropriate to say thank you to people for what they should be doing." That ended our meeting! I went home and told my wife what the pastor had said. Her reply was priceless...

"When is gratitude ever inappropriate?"

Exactly! I know Christians should give. Yet what is wrong with saying thank you? How is showing gratitude wrong? Frankly, it is not. Have you ever resented someone saying thank you to you? Probably never. Yet, when someone doesn't say thank you it does make an impact.

To increase giving and givers you need to regularly say thank you to your donors. Remember, non-profits put the church to shame with regards to this. One reason why they do this is that a thank you builds the platform for the next "ask." Here is my view of thank you's...

Thank you's are the most positive reminder of giving you can make!

I am always trying to build for the next gift. I want people to give once, then again and again until they get the joy of generosity. Saying thank you builds toward the next gift.

If we show we value the donor they are much more apt to donate again!

THE STEWARDSHIP JOURNAL

The Gratitude Lane: Using the Power of Saying Thank You

A second reason you need a Gratitude Lane is that it sets you apart from the crowd.

“WOW! Everything about PCC continually blows me away and exceeds all of my expectations!” That was the reaction a first-time donor gave after a pastor wrote her a handwritten thank you. The woman wrote back to the pastor because she was amazed he responded. Obviously, that had never happened to her before. I think PCC has a much better chance of getting another gift from this woman simply because the pastor took the time to say thank you. Before you say you don’t have time, let me point out the pastor in this story has three campuses running around 2,000. Yet, *every* week he takes time to say thank you.

Another reason you need a Gratitude Lane is that you are continually losing donors. We track clients' giving and most average anywhere from a 15% to 20% loss in givers *every* year. We call this The Churn Rate. Every church loses donors each year. Some die, some move away and some simply stop coming or giving. Some churn is out of your control. Your goal is to minimize your churn rate. Giving experts are thus focused upon donor retention, especially top tier donors. A regular plan of expressing gratitude can help minimize your Churn Rate.

Still, no matter what you do, you too will lose donors this year. You can see how important it is to add new donors. First impressions are the most lasting. If a person gives to your church and never hears back, what does that say? When a donor gives for the first time and is thanked for that gift we have a greater likelihood of receiving another gift. Which is...

The final reason why you need a Gratitude Lane is that it paves the way for the next gift! As I said earlier, a thank you is the most positive reminder of giving there is. Your thank you note or letter builds a bridge to the next “ask.”

Who do you need to thank today for their faithfulness in generosity? A good step is thanking first-time donors. But don’t stop there. A church that shows generosity to its donors is a church that has a better chance of being fully funded. So,

Say thanks regularly and often!



Mark Brooks – The Stewardship Coach
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Find out how to access all of my playbooks at <https://acts17generosity.com/store/>.

Did you miss my special announcement on The Digital Lane? Data drives much of my strategy for churches. Our financial analysis while very good, did not give us the instant ability to respond to giving challenges. Now, through our partnership with MortarStone, we can provide for you up to date analysis of your giving trends. Find out more at this special site on my webpage: <https://acts17generosity.com/giving-analysis/>.

THE STEWARDSHIP JOURNAL

Bonus Material

Crafting a Thank You Card or Letter

Here are some pointers and thoughts about crafting a thank you card or letter...

- **Get to the point!** It's about saying thanks, not telling them how great your church is.
- **Make it brief.** People are busy these days and they won't read more than a paragraph or two.
- **Personalize it.** The most successful responses use the person's name. That is a start, but make their gift come alive by helping...
- **Connect the dots for them.** Briefly share what their gifts do in helping advance the Kingdom of God, making our world a better place to live in. When people see what their gift is doing, they are more apt to give again.
- **Make it interesting.** Tell some real-life story that makes the note readable. Say NO to boring letters and emails!

Say thank you often and to everyone! Don't stop by only thanking first-time donors. Thank everyone! Carve out thirty minutes to an hour each week specifically for thanking donors.

Here are a few segments to consider thanking...

- **First-time donors** – One of your goals is to start a conversation with these donors that will lead to the next gift given and ultimately that donor realizing the joy of generosity.
- **Top tier donors.** The average church sees 15% of their donor base give 50% of all that is given. These people put the gas in your tank for missions and ministry. Why not write a personal note of thanks to one from this key group each week?
- **The faithful but forgotten.** Who is your widow's mite giver? Why not pick someone in your church who gives faithfully year after year? Send one note a week saying thanks and praying for that person that gives faithfully no matter what their amount.

Publicly say thank you regularly and often. Every offering time should be a time to thank those that donate to your church. You can also say thanks through your Social Media posts. Showing gratitude to those that help fuel your missions and ministry will help increase giving.

THE STEWARDSHIP JOURNAL

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 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.

Showers of Blessing

April showers will bring...? Some of you knew the answer. April showers bring May flowers. I don't know about you but some good rain showers to wash winter away and bring us spring is much needed. We could all use a breath of fresh air. April showers fill us with hope.

I was reminded of the Word of the Lord that came through Ezekiel the prophet to give hope to Israel when He said in Ezekiel 34:25-27,

²⁵ And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods.

²⁶ And I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing.

²⁷ And the tree of the field shall yield her fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase, and they shall be safe in their land, and shall know that I am the LORD, when I have broken the bands of their yoke, and delivered them out of the hand of those that served themselves of them.

At YOUR CHURCH NAME our passion is to be a blessing to our community and the world! Each time you give here we use your generosity to bring the refreshing shower of God's love to those around us. Thank you for being a shower of blessing.

Find the way easiest for you to give and let's bring on an April rain for a spring harvest ahead!
