

The Stewardship

JOURNAL

April 19, 2021

**From the Desk of Our
Executive Director**

**Let's Use VBS to Establish
a Culture of Stewardship**

**The Legacy Lane: A New Way
of Looking at Giving**

**The Next Generation
of American Giving**

Sowing for a Harvest

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From the Desk of Our Executive Director

Have you started your VBS planning? Vacation Bible School has served Southern Baptists as one of our primary evangelism tools. In this edition of *The Stewardship Journal*, I write about how VBS is also where we have an opportunity to teach the joy of stewardship, with my post entitled, ***Let's Use VBS to Establish a Culture of Stewardship***. Let's pray for a great summer of helping boys and girls unearth the truth about Jesus.

Here is a preview of what you can expect in the pages that follow.

In our April 5th issue of *The Journal*, Mark Brooks, The Stewardship Coach, introduced **The Legacy Lane** strategy. In this issue, he states, "I focused upon the fact that every church in America is faced with huge infrastructure needs that will require additional funds to properly address. The question is, how? I will continue fleshing that out for us in this edition of the Coach entitled, ***The Legacy Lane: A New Way of Looking at Giving***.

In our **Bonus Section**, we share the findings on the changes in generational giving from the Blackbaud Institute, one of the premier think tanks on charitable giving. In 2018, they wrote a white paper entitled, ***The Next Generation of American Giving***. This paper charts how generational giving is changing the charitable landscape. We give a summary of their findings with commentary on how this impacts the church.

Offering Talk – It's springtime, which for many people means planting. This week's offering talk focuses on planting and harvesting in a talk entitled, **Sowing for a Harvest**.

Thanks for reading and, as always, our prayer for this *Journal* is to help your church be financially secure into the future.

Advancing the Gospel!



Dr. John Yeats

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Let's Use VBS to Establish a Culture of Stewardship

Dr. John Yeats, Executive Director, Missouri Baptist Convention

Sometimes the cure to a problem lies right in front of you. Like staring at a chessboard, you can be too close to the action to see the obvious move. Churches are currently going through a great transition of our key donor groups aging and moving off the scene. Younger generations have yet to step up to fill the void. At least not yet. We have been searching for answers when at least one answer is right in front of us: Vacation Bible School. I believe it is time to use VBS to establish a culture of stewardship.

A Brief VBS History

VBS has been a Southern Baptist staple for as long as any of us can remember. A study of the history of VBS runs straight through our convention. Most credit the initial rise of Vacation Bible School to be a result of the ministry of a Baptist woman named Mrs. Walker Aylett Hawes, who moved with her husband, a doctor, to New York City. Her brother-in-law was John A. Broadus, a founder and later president of Southern Seminary. Mrs. Hawes became concerned about the poor children running around in summer with nothing to do. In 1898 and 1899, she rented a beer hall during the daytime for her Everyday Bible School. Vacation Bible School developed from a beer hall to sweep the nation.¹

Down through the ages, VBS has played a significant role in shaping our convention. Lifeway made this observation about the importance of VBS to the convention:

"Professions of faith made during Vacation Bible School consistently equal about 25 percent of the number of baptisms in the Southern Baptist Convention... Nearly 3 million children, youth, and adults register for VBS at more than 25,000 Southern Baptist churches each year and report nearly 90,000 professions of faith in Christ." 2.

There is perhaps no greater tool for evangelism than Vacation Bible School. While the *how* of VBS might change, the mission remains. **Destination Dig: Unearthing the Truth About Jesus**, this year's theme, expresses exactly the heart of what Mrs. Hawes created, a tool for evangelizing children. How many of your members came to Christ as a result of a VBS?

Why We Need to Consider Using VBS to Create a Culture of Stewardship

We have been sharing with you statistics about the decline in giving to the church. One of our challenges lies in the fact that the younger generation has not yet stepped up to fill the void of our aging donor base.

Consider that the under-25 age group donates the smallest portion of their income to charity. However, of the amount given by the under-25 cohort, 74% of that amount was to "church, religious organizations." John and Sylvia Ronsvalle studied this and found that as people aged, they gave more to charities but that "church, religious organizations" remained the largest portion of the total they give. They then made this observation:

"young people learn their philanthropic values first in religious settings."³

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Let's Use VBS to Establish a Culture of Stewardship (cont)

You have seen the same studies I have about the decline in church attendance. Today, those without religion, the Nones, are the fastest-growing "faith group" in America. If Americans learn philanthropy in religious settings, and fewer are attending religious events, we are in trouble on so many levels.

The VBS Solution - I can still remember bringing my offering with me to Vacation Bible School. You probably have similar memories. We didn't take up an offering to increase our bottom line. We took up an offering to *teach* stewardship. We typically tell stories linking the offering to giving. Our teachers and leaders made it fun with contests and other motivation. We dug deep, and we gave.

How many unchurched children do you think ever gave their first penny to a VBS offering? How many of those same children would later in the week pray to receive Christ? How many of those same children are now your deacons, choir members, Sunday School teachers, your faithful stewards?

I want to challenge us as we begin our Vacation Bible School preparations to consider how we can use VBS to establish a culture of stewardship. If your church has used some creative ways for this, please let us know. Consider making the offering a gift to the Missouri Baptist Children's Home or to the ministries of the International Mission Board or to a mission project your local association is targeting. Let's make this our best Vacation Bible School summer ever!

1. <https://vbs.lifeway.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/HistoryofVBS.pdf>
 2. <https://get.bible/blog/post/idea-6-value-of-vacation-bible-schools>
 3. **The State of Church Giving through 2015**, by John L. Ronsvalle and Sylvia Ronsvalle empty tomb, inc. page 94
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Current Events and Relevant Thoughts From:

The Stewardship Coach

Mark Brooks

The Legacy Lane: A New Way of Looking at Giving



Can you see the arrow in the FedEx logo? I remember years ago watching an interview, and someone pointed out that there was an arrow between the E and x of their logo. I had never seen it before, yet there it was right in front of my eyes all along. When it comes to stewardship, I feel like I'm the only one seeing the arrow.

The Stewardship Revolution was the title of a book I started writing soon after leaving one of my industry's leading stewardship firms. My better side told me that my emotions were too raw at that moment to publish the work. Yet, that title explains a lot about my view of how we are currently handling stewardship. A year later, in 2009, after my emotions had settled down a bit, I re-started the book with a new slant and title, **The Stewardship Revolution: New Ways of Looking at Giving**. I never finished the book, but I have been living it out in practice. Why? **I see the arrow that few see, and that arrow is not pointing in a positive direction.**

In issue 14 of the Coach, I introduced **The Legacy Lane** strategy that I will be continuing in this edition. I focused upon the fact that every church in America is faced with huge infrastructure needs that will require additional funds to properly address. The question is, how? I will continue fleshing that out for us in this edition of the Coach entitled **The Legacy Lane: A New Way of Looking at Giving**. Long before COVID hit our shores, we needed a new way of looking at giving.

Just in case I have bored you thus far, let me state that you are headed for a potential financial disaster unless you do something given the current giving climate. Why? Let me borrow from a quote from Dr. Ronnie Floyd's book, **Ten Percent: A Call to Biblical Stewardship**.

"By the year 2050, at the present rate of decline in giving to the Church, Americans will only give 1.66% of their disposable incomes to the Church. This means that in less than thirty years, your church could be seeing almost a 50% decline in giving. Every Church will be impacted by this, with thousands closing their doors for good."

Can your church survive taking in 50% less?

Why the 50% Line and your Over/Under Split are predictors of your future. I introduced these concepts in Issue 14 in my Bonus Section. Your Over/Under Split of your top 50% tells you the timeframe until financial disaster hits you. It's simple math. Let me explain.

On average, the typical church sees 15% of their donors give 50% of all that is given. That is what I have discovered after nearly twenty-five years of looking at church giving data. For multiple million-dollar budgets, the average runs typically around 10% or less. Our data reveals that half of the 15% commits 50% of what is committed in capital campaigns. The remaining half of the 15% commits around 40%. Clearly, a few give the majority of all that is given. The question for you is, how many of your top 15% are heading into or are already in retirement?

The Over/Under Split will show you the percentage of your giving coming from those above fifty years of age and those below. The higher the percentage above fifty, sixty, or even seventies, gives you an indication of how quickly your budget could be in trouble. For more on how age determines giving, see the Bonus Section.

We must stop being reactive and start being proactive. It is time we stop talking about the decline in giving and start doing something. My strategy for churches is two-fold. First, we must make stewardship a part of our discipleship process. We have a generation of believers that are uneducated about the importance of stewardship. We must change this by making

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The Legacy Lane: A New Way of Looking at Giving (cont)

stewardship a regular part of our teaching. While we are working to bring up the Next Generation of donors, we must focus on our current key donors, helping them use God's blessing in their lives for Kingdom purposes. This is why I believe that every church needs a Legacy Lane strategy. Let me start by giving you my definition of a Legacy Team.

Legacy Team Definition – A group of people who either have the gift of generosity or they are looking for creative ways to use the blessings God has given them to be a blessing to others.

In 2006 my friend, Glenn Sauls, and I began the process of changing how we worked with churches when they needed to raise capital dollars. We both knew from data that giving was centralized in a few key donors. To raise the dollars needed, we shifted from a team-building concept to helping coach pastors know how to engage these key donors. One of my trained associates coined the term **Directed Coaching**. We moved away from only focusing upon capital dollars to total stewardship coaching. Frankly, our industry thought we were nuts. COVID changed all that, and now the very same folks who criticized us have moved to a similar concept.

Legacy giving is not a new concept. The term was used by many in our industry to denote top-tiered donors. When I was at ISS, we used this term to define our top band of donors. Pastor Chris Hodges, of Highlands Church in Birmingham AL, has used this concept effectively, and many churches are following a similar process. I believe developing a Legacy Lane that results in you building a Legacy Team is how you can fund your present and future. I am moving every one of my churches to this strategy.

Common Reservations Leaders Have – Let me deal with church leaders' major objections for not wanting to develop a Legacy Lane.

1. **"I don't want to know what people give."** Relax, you will never have to look at who gives what if that is your choice. You can alphabetize the list, so you never know who gives what if that is your desire.
2. **"I don't want to show favoritism."** Anyone can join this team, including my 92-year-old parents, who write a \$50 check a month to their dentist for dental mission work in third-world countries.
3. **"Won't this create a restricted gift crisis?"** No, not if you set it up correctly. The focus of your Legacy Team is to help you raise whatever over and above giving your church needs and secure your financial future.
4. **"Isn't this a large church strategy?"** Any church can implement this strategy as every church has people with a heart for generosity.

You and your people will love this approach to raising dollars! Setting up a Legacy Lane and building a Legacy Team will forever change how you approach raising funds! I have seen pastors who normally hated any talk about money be changed by this concept. One reason why is your focus is not on money. It's on missions and ministry. The other reason is your Team gives you permission to reach out to them when there is a need. The Legacy Team allows you to communicate your vision at a deeper level with key leaders, and it allows your key leaders a more inside view of the church they support.

I believe this is the future of giving, and remember, the church that survives the future is the church that plans TODAY for tomorrow!



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

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Bonus Material

The Next Generation of American Giving

The Blackbaud Institute is one of the premier think tanks on charitable giving. In 2018 they wrote a white paper entitled, *The Next Generation of American Giving*. This paper charts how generational giving is changing the charitable landscape. The following is a summary of their findings with commentary on how this impacts the church. The paper listed key findings of their study on generational giving. Here are their observations...

- 1. Fewer Americans are giving.** Who is surprised at this? What might surprise you is that Baby Boomers are the only generation that did *not* see a decline in giving. Every other generational group saw declines in the number of people giving to charities. Even as the amount of dollars has gone up, the number of people giving has declined. This is the neglected other side of the coin.
- 2. The Greatest Generation is in its sunset years.** This generation still gives proportionally more than any other. Yet their numbers are declining and thus their giving impact.
- 3. Baby Boomers remain the most generous generation.** "For those who are waiting for the ascendancy of Baby Boomer donors to pass from the scene, the wait is going to take a while." That is their summation of the continued dominance of Baby Boomers. How much longer will they dominate the giving landscape? **Blackbaud estimates for at least another five years. Remember, they said this in 2018, before COVID hit!**
- 4. Generation X is on deck (and there are way more Gen-Xers than you think).** Millennials get all the headlines, but Generation X is less than 2 million people behind in terms of size. This key group is *now* in their prime earning years. Generation X is now the second leading generational group in terms of total giving.
- 5. Millennial giving is still a work in progress.** 14%. That is what Millennials as a group contributed overall compared to other generations. One positive is that Millennial giving was trending up, so there is hope. However, the Blackbaud study shows that the Millennials' impact on giving is still many years away.
- 6. Introducing Gen Z.** Those born in 1996 and beyond represent the other potential donor group. While presently only making up 2% of giving, they could be poised to make a significant difference in the future.
- 7. Channel proliferation continues confounding strategy and attribution.** The study found that people give in multiple ways. We are used to and like choices.
- 8. Concern about overhead remains high.** The Blackbaud report found that all generations express concern about financial efficiency.

Recommendations from *The Next Generation of American Giving*...

- 1. Focus on the generations that matter today.** Right now, that is GenX and Baby Boomers.
- 2. Redouble your focus on the fundamentals.** My word for that is discipleship.
- 3. Get serious about retention.** Don't lose what you already have!
- 4. Get your house in order.** "Ignoring internal issues is not a luxury any organization can afford."
- 5. Stay agile.** COVID showed us how important agility and flexibility are.
- 6. Commit to testing.** They state, "Don't assume past tactics will continue to work."
- 7. Listen to your donors.** To that, I say, Amen!

You can download a copy here...

<https://institute.blackbaud.com/asset/the-next-generation-of-american-giving-2018/>

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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 as 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.

Sowing for a Harvest

Do we have any gardeners here? Even those who are not gardeners know you plant in April and then remember the phrase, **April showers will bring May flowers**. Some might want to change that to say, "April showers will bring summer tomatoes." It's springtime, and we know that if we want flowers or fruit, we must plant seed. It's the principle of sowing and reaping.

The Bible talks a lot about the principle of sowing and reaping. As we focus on our time of giving, I want to read from 2 Corinthians 9:6-11.

⁶Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. ⁹As it is written:

"They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor;
their righteousness endures forever." [a]

¹⁰Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

Every time you give here, you sow seeds for a harvest of life change in our city and around the world. Let's sow generously so we can reap generously!
