

The
Stewardship
JOURNAL
May 17, 2021

**From the Desk of Our
Executive Director**

On the Current State of Giving

**The Offering's Not Dead;
It's Different**

**How to Use Memorial Day
Weekend to Increase Stewardship**

Let's Get Ready for Summer

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From the Desk of Our Executive Director

"It now appears the pandemic is going to be with us for many more weeks." I made that prediction in our opening Stewardship Journal back on January 4. Our team decided to revisit that edition with this challenge, "We thought it would be interesting to see what Dr. Yeats and Mark Brooks, The Stewardship Coach, would say now that we are approaching the halfway point of the year." In our opening post, entitled, ***On the Current State of Giving***, I share some news that would have surprised me in January. Mark Brooks gives us his expertise on where we are now, and we both land at the same conclusion with regards to our needs in the future.

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

How much time do you spend planning out and executing your announcements compared to your offering time? Mark Brooks writes a timely piece on the offering, entitled, ***The Offering is Not Dead; It's Different***. Don't miss his Five Keys to Financial Stability for Your Church Starts with Knowing How to Receive the Offering in a Pandemic. Great thoughts on how to improve giving through taking up the offering.

Do you have a Memorial Day offering plan? In our Bonus Section, we provide you with keys to planning a successful Memorial Day offering to start your summer giving out right. Summer is always a challenging time for giving, and this advice will help you avoid the summer slump in giving.

Speaking of the offering, each week, we provide you with a written talk that allows you to focus on missions and ministry. This week's talk is entitled, ***Let's Get Ready for Summer***. This is a great example of how to point people to your summer's mission and ministry initiatives to inspire giving.

Do you have a story of stewardship you would like to share? We would love to hear it. Let us know. Also, if you know of someone that would like to receive the Journal, please send them this link for easy signup:

<https://mobaptist.org/stewardship/stewardship-journal/>.

Advancing the Gospel!



Dr. John Yeats

THE STEWARDSHIP JOURNAL

On the Current State of Giving

Dr. John Yeats and Rev. Mark Brooks

In our first edition, MBC Executive Director John Yeats said, "All of us are concerned about how COVID-19 and the lockdowns are impacting giving. It now appears the pandemic is going to be with us for many more weeks." We thought it would be interesting to see what Dr. Yeats and Mark Brooks, The Stewardship Coach, would say now that we are approaching the year's halfway point. We asked them both to write about what they see in terms of the current state of giving. We have entitled this post, *On the Current State of Giving*.

Dr. John Yeats

Executive Director, Missouri Baptist Convention

Recording Secretary, Southern Baptist Convention

When we first started discussing this post, my immediate thought was, has it only been four months since our first Stewardship Journal was published? Time flies when you are pedaling as fast as you can. As a result of this fast pace we are all under, time can slip by you. When I read what I wrote back in January, I had no idea how long "many more weeks" would become. It is apparent that while we are seeing more churches returning to normal, we are still under a cloud of this pandemic and will be for a lot longer than any of us thought. It is beneficial to stop from time to time and reflect and analyze how all the events we are experiencing are impacting stewardship.

Recently, I shared an update with the MBC Executive Board about the state of our convention. I began my comments by pointing out that we continue to hear reports of the increasing number of churches that are leaving the perils of COVID behind and returning to worship as a community. Many churches are discovering new opportunities for small groups, including relationship strengthening and Bible study/prayer times. Our Making Disciples group phone calls have increased significantly as churches/associations are calling and looking for solutions.

I wanted to start my report to the Board about the very thing that drives us Southern Baptists: making disciples. This is important from a giving standpoint because discipleship produces generous people. My next point to the Board was the current state of giving in the MBC. Missouri Baptists have always been a generous people. We are grateful for their continued support of the Cooperative Program, the conduit for missions and ministry. Here is the amazing thing: through the first third of the year, we are 11.47% ahead of last year and 5.43% ahead of our 2021 spending plan. We have not experienced such a healthy CP income report since 2008. Thank you for sharing the good word of the Cooperative Program with your network of relationships.

Given all that we have been through, our current state of giving is strong. This allows us to continue our missions and ministries here locally and around the world. Let me share one word of caution. The level of giving we are experiencing is Boomer-driven and not sustainable without some training and engagement. To maintain the healthy financial picture we are enjoying, we *must* continue to make disciples, teaching stewardship as an integral part of that process.

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On the Current State of Giving

Rev. Mark Brooks

The Stewardship Coach

God bless Missouri Baptists! Frankly, if you would have told me in January that giving to the Cooperative Program would be more than 10% ahead of last year, I would have questioned your data. Yet that is exactly what has happened. So, let me begin by saying that this speaks volumes.

First, churches and denominations that preach the tithe always weather crisis better than those that devalue the offering and giving. This showed up during The Great Recession as many "seeker friendly" churches were forced into massive cutbacks due to a decline in giving. Southern Baptists have historically focused on making disciples while the Contemporary Church Movement is focused on attracting a crowd. When a crisis hits, the crowd is the first to withhold their offering. The Missouri Baptist Convention is in good financial shape due to years of faithful preaching and teaching on stewardship. The seeds sown in the '50s and '60s are bearing fruit in 2021.

Next, while we can rejoice over the generosity of our churches through the pandemic, we need to ask the question, who gave most of that money? Dr. Yeats is correct in his statement that the level of giving to MBC churches is Boomer-driven. Through our review of church giving and the studies we have read, this is a national trend. Top-tiered donors are digging deeper to give more, thus assuring their churches stayed open. Those top-tiered donors are almost all Baby Boomers. The question we are posing to our clients is, how much longer can this key group continue to save us financially? Remember, 10,000 Boomers a day turn 65, with many moving into retirement.

So, while we rejoice that giving has stayed strong, it further re-enforces what giving experts have been saying well before COVID. Our key donor base is aging, *and* churches are struggling to keep and attract younger generations. We have devalued any talk of money in our churches, and the result is a generation of poorly equipped Christ-followers. Giving is strong now, but what will it look like in a decade when Boomers will all be retired?

We have been lulled to sleep by the overall amounts given while ignoring the trend that Americans are giving less of their disposable incomes to the church. During The Great Depression, Americans gave over 3% of their disposable incomes to the church. Since 1968, that percentage has been on a slow but steady decline. Now, Americans give slightly above 2% to the church. By the year 2050, that percentage will be around 1%.

Finally, let me agree with Dr. Yeats when he said, "To maintain the healthy financial picture we are enjoying, we *must* continue to make disciples by teaching stewardship as an integral part of that process."

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Current Events and Relevant Thoughts From:

The Stewardship Coach

Mark Brooks

The Offering's Not Dead; It's Different



Can I ask you a few questions as we begin class today? How much time goes into planning out your announcements, and how much time do you give *for* announcements during the service?

Last Sunday at church, the announcement time went about ninety seconds. They had slides going in the background that someone had to put time into producing. Who knows what time that took? Who decides what is announced each Sunday? That smells like a thirty-minute slice out of some meeting to decide. My point is that behind the ninety-second or so announcements *before* the sermon, a lot of work was put in.

OK, class, how many of you know what question the Coach is going to ask next? Yep. How much time every week do you put into planning out the weekend's offering, and how much time do you give the offering during the service? Shouldn't our answer show us what we deem most important?

In the last few weeks, I have read several articles, posts, social media comments, etc., about the death of the offering. By the way, I was searching for just the right picture when I saw this kid. He expresses exactly how I feel right now, trying to get people's attention that the offering is NOT dead; it's different. That is the title of this Coach, ***The Offering's Not Dead; It's Different***. If I had a subtitle, it would be, ***How to Receive the Offering in a Pandemic***. More on that later.

Read my first post on this concept at <https://gyve.com/2020/05/01/the-offering-is-not-dead-its-different/>.

The problem is a lot of our so-called experts are looking at this wrong. They are focusing on *how*. We can get to the how part later. I care about the *why*. We must get this right. This verse from my quiet time says it all, "I will come into your temple with burnt offerings and fulfill my vows to you" (Psalm 66:13). The offering is worship. Kill it, and you kill worship.

If it's worship, then let's treat it that way. Because our actions speak louder than our words when it comes to the offering. I get that some of you will never pass a bucket, plate, or whatever again. Fine. My point is that if you never make mention of worship through giving, then not only will your giving go down; you've robbed your people of a blessing.

If we eliminate any offering time during our worship, how can you show and teach stewardship? The offering time gives us a golden opportunity to teach the joys of generosity lived out through a life of good stewardship. It's called making disciples. COVID showed us the importance of making disciples as opposed to drawing a crowd.

The problem isn't a giving problem. It's a lack of leadership problem. We have devalued the offering, and we rarely, if ever, preach on giving. Our NextGens are woefully behind in stewardship education. We keep kicking the stewardship can down the road because we are pressed with so many other things right now. I'm sure the re-arranged deck chairs up there on the ship look nice. But I'm the guy down here in the engine room, and I'm telling you, "you're leaking water, and we are running low on fuel."

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The Offering's Not Dead; It's Different

I'm going to wear out my B key, trying to make my point. You must figure out how to receive the offering and how to communicate the *why* of the offering. **Because if you can't get the offering right, you will always struggle financially.**

So, again, the offering is not dead; it's simply different. That difference will determine your financial solvency as an institution. If you think it is only the smallest of churches folding, I can tell you for a fact that's not true. There are megachurches in financial stress right now, just as there are smaller churches in financial stress.

Five Keys to Financial Stability for Your Church Starts With Knowing How to Receive the Offering in a Pandemic

1. **Give the offering equal priority as the announcements:** equal planning time and equal platform time.
2. **Plan out each and every offering. *Always!*** We provide you with one every week called a ... **Missions and Ministry Moment** – During the Lockdown, we stopped calling, well, "offering talks," offering talks. We started calling them Mission and Ministry Moments. We teach that by telling the story of *how* you are changing the world one life at a time, and inviting people to support that, is the door to gaining the first gift. In two minutes or less. You have to think about that for both in-person worship and live-stream.
3. **Make it easy for people to give in their favorite way.** With today's technology, the offering plate is open 24/7.
4. **Never, ever forget that the offering *is* worship.** Instead of killing it, hiding it, ignoring it, why don't we make it worshipful? What could your team do with all that creativity they possess if they saw the offering not as an intrusion upon their time, but what it is, worship. I firmly believe that it was not *that* we ask for money that turns people off. It was *how* we asked. Guilt never works. Let's change the offering time by making it better.
5. **Make the "ask" and stop apologizing!** This is the important part of the class, look in the eye of that camera and into the eyes of your people, smile and make the "ask!" Look, I get I'm the money guy. But think about what you are asking them to do. You are asking them to join you in *worshipping* God with our gifts. You are asking them to help you make a difference in the lives of others with their generosity. It's a Psalms 66:13 call. We come to the temple *with* our offering. Let's invite everyone to join us and stop wasting time telling them they don't have to give. Like they can't figure that out? Stop apologizing for the offering, and you will see your offerings go up!

That's it. Do these five things every week in some fashion. Think and plan it out across all platforms. Each week.

The easiest, quickest, and frankly most enjoyable way to increase giving is by taking your offering time to the next level.



Mark Brooks – The Stewardship Coach

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Head off the summer slump in giving with my newly released playbook, *The 15 Offerings of Summer: How to Reverse the Summer Slump in 60 Seconds*, at <https://acts17generosity.com/store/>.

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Bonus Material

How to Use Memorial Day Weekend to Increase Stewardship

Back before the pandemic, three-day holiday weekends were always offering killers. Summers are bookended by Memorial Day and Labor Day. Expectations are that this year people will be traveling more, making the start of your summer giving challenge, well, challenging. Here are some thoughts on how you can use the upcoming Memorial Day Weekend to increase stewardship. Since many will not be physically in attendance due to COVID or vacation, you need a strategy beyond the 11 AM hour of Sunday worship. The following is a step-by-step process of how to reverse any three-day holiday weekend challenges you might face this year.

First, the keys to a successful Memorial Day offering or any special offering time for that matter. Start by:

- ✓ **Planning!** You can't decide on Saturday night to do something on Sunday and expect great results. The more you plan out the offering, the better chance you have for success.
- ✓ **Vision!** The more appealing the appeal, the better the results. Take the time to craft a compelling vision, and you will see greater success.
- ✓ **Remember, every "ask" needs a driver!** What will drive your potential donors to want to give you a gift on your special offering day? Just asking people to give for the sake of giving will not generate the dollars you need. Make the "ask" compelling!
- ✓ **Execution!** It is not enough to have a plan! You **MUST** work that plan through all existing platforms and tell your story.

An Overview of What a Memorial Day Giving Plan Looks Like

Step One: Mail a snail mail letter on **Monday, May 24**, laying out your summer objectives, inviting people to make a difference by supporting that work. **Show them how Memorial Day's offering is crucial for mission success!** Put a postage-paid envelope with it and include your giving page's URL address in the PS.

Step Two: Email your donors on Friday morning, May 28, reminding them of the exciting missions and ministry initiatives of summer and asking them to give to help support those before they get away for the holiday by clicking the provided link to your giving page. The more compelling the email's appeal and the easier it is to give, the more apt they will be to give.

Step Three: Plan out and execute a killer Missions and Ministry Moment in two minutes or less that shows the various upcoming summer events and the impact they make. Then look the camera and the people in the eye and invite them...

Step Four: Sunday afternoon, May 30, email/text donors with a final appeal. Make it short and to the point.

Optional Step Five: Consider one last follow-up email blast on **Memorial Day, May 31**.

Get a full summer plan for giving with *The 15 Offerings of Summer: How to Reverse the Summer Slump in 60 Seconds* at: <https://acts17generosity.com/store/>.

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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.

Let's Get Ready for Summer

Anybody making plans for summer? You might be getting the grill out. Or getting out the camping stuff or maybe getting ready to lay around the pool. The point is, *you* are getting ready for summer!

We are getting ready for summer here at YOUR CHURCH NAME! Summers are our busiest time of the year. Consider that this summer we will...

- List any mission trips you have planned,
- List any camps or retreats for youth or students,
- List Vacation Bible School or children's camps,
- AND we will still be open, doing all our regular ministry week by week!

To make sure these events go off smoothly, we have been planning and working for months.

You can help us assure that these vital missions and ministry initiatives happen by faithfully giving to YOUR CHURCH NAME. We give you multiple ways by which you can give. We are so grateful for your support. Help us get ready for summer today with a generous gift.
