

Articles for Pastors

Asking For?

Many pastors have commented to us that they find it difficult to ask their people for money. Frequently such feelings arise from the realization that the pastor's salary and benefits are the bulk of the congregation's budget. Pastors sometimes feel that it is "self-serving" to ask their members to give more when they know they're the primary beneficiaries. These concerns are, of course, legitimate.

The following thoughts are ways to deal with this concern (and others) and yet recognize the need that members have to give. Even if we fail to do the right thing for the right reasons, we still fail to invite people to prayerfully consider their giving.

I offer several axioms:

1. Ask no one to do anything you are unwilling to do yourself. Just as people respect "bosses" who are willing to get their hands dirty, they respect pastors who set an example of a good steward when asking them to give. A few pastors say, "But I give my whole life to Christ!" But I have to respond, "Unless you give your money as well as your service, you have not given your whole life. The money God entrusts to you is also part of your life." Leaders lead. If we expect our people to give sacrificially, we need to set the example. Besides that, in not giving sacrificially of your money, you deny yourself the joy of giving. Experiencing the blessings of giving, makes it easier to recommend giving.
2. Realize that money is minted self. People put in a hard day's work for their money. When they receive their pay, that labor is turned into dollars. Thus the dollars they give are the fruits of their labor. Giving our money, like giving our time and abilities, is really a giving of our selves.
3. When we ask people to give, we're asking them to commit themselves to Christ. In this respect, stewardship and evangelism have much in common. When we invite a person to commit their life to Christ, we ask that they give their whole heart, mind, life, and pocketbook. Mature Christian people first give themselves to the Lord (cf. 2 Cor. 8:5). Their stewardship is merely a response to giving the rest of their lives.
4. Yes, we're also asking people to serve. One sure fire way to serve is to give our time, abilities, and money to fulfill the ministry that Christ mandates of the church. We can't all go to the mission fields in far off lands, but we are there with our contributions. Our money is sort of a proxy. We are missionaries just as surely as if we were commissioned and serving in those far away places. That also includes the fact that they call a pastor to minister on their behalf. The pastor's salary enables their proxy in ministering to others in their congregation and community.
5. But make no mistake, we are asking for money too. We live in an economic world. Money may not make the world go round, but it does enable ministry. And money is for most people a thing of great value (like the pearl of great price). Lest it get control of us, we need to take control of it. One way to keep it from capturing our worship is to give it away joyfully and sacrificially as an act of worship.

6. When we ask, we also have the opportunity to ask specifically. There are many ministries in all of our congregations. It is not inappropriate to lift these up as challenges for expanded mission and ministry. And what of our Synod and Churchwide mission support? Can you think of anything more selfless to ask for?

When a pastor asks people to give, s/he is not asking for a raise. Yes, in some cases our clergy should ask for that too, but not as a part of a sermon or a stewardship program.

Most of all, let's not forget prayer. We need to invite our members to prayerfully consider what God is calling them to give. - Eugene Grimm

Coaching Stewardship

Tom Landry, who was Head Coach of the Dallas Cowboys, once said, "I have a job to do that is not very complicated, but it is often difficult: to get a group of men to do what they don't want to do so they can achieve the one thing they have wanted all their lives."

In some ways that sounds like the role of a pastor, doesn't it? To get people to do what they don't naturally want to do so they can achieve the things they want even more than they realize.

One of the areas in which a pastor frequently has to try to get people to do what they don't naturally want to do is that of stewardship, particularly of trying to get people to give of their time, talents and financial resources to the work of the Lord. Stewardship is an area which many pastors would prefer to avoid altogether, but they realize that the work and ministry of their churches are dependent on the involvement of their people.

So, what can a pastor do? Some do nothing, of course, hoping that somehow, some way, their people will catch a vision of what it means to give to the Lord. Others scold and try to lay a guilt trip on their people for not giving as they are capable of giving or at a sufficient level to meet the need. Still others preach an occasional sermon on stewardship when there is a pressing need (the benefits are usually short-term).

However, some pastors choose to teach Biblical stewardship. Their people grow spiritually which results in growing generosity. And that is the fundamental goal and process of Eugene Grimm's program that you have been given. Furthermore, this program is not going to be yet one more big job for the pastor. It is laid out for easy use and utilizes the efforts of a number of people in clearly defined tasks that are not difficult.

This will be a tool to help you to, "get people to do what they need in order to achieve the things they have wanted all their lives."

Have Patience

When a church enters into a stewardship program it is important to understand that although there may be remarkable short-term results; the program is never intended to be a "quick fix." Our number one goal in stewardship education is spiritual growth and in that way, creating generous people. There are very effective guilt and emotion based approaches to

increasing a congregation's giving, but they are short-term quick fixes. This is not what we want for followers of Jesus.

Using a good Biblically based stewardship program involves both confidence and patience. It requires patience in the same way that you do not plant a seed in the ground and then pull it up every few days to see what progress it is making. Instead, you allow it to remain out of sight, undisturbed, doing whatever it does without you watching. The same is true of a biblically based stewardship program. It is best left to grow and produce a harvest. Just as a seed planted in the ground eventually will produce fruit if it is watered and fertilized properly, a biblically based stewardship program will also produce fruit if allowed to quietly work.

So it is that we can have confidence that this will happen because our confidence is not in the program or the resources in the program. Our confidence is in God, who has promised to honor His Word and to cause it to prosper. (Is. 55:10-11)

Vision

Vision is important to churches (and everything else). Vision is seeing the end result before beginning a project. It makes things happen. For us Christians, it is the energy that comes from deep convictions based on how we see and relate to God.

If, like Isaiah, we see God "high and lifted up," far above all that we see around us or can imagine, then our vision of life itself will take on a similar perspective. In reality, a lot of our effectiveness in our Christian works begins and ends with how we perceive God.

Furthermore, our vision affects how we live. If our vision is focused on the short-range and the short-term, then we will live with a frame of reference that is also short-range and short-term. In that case we will pretty much let our lives be run by whatever is urgent, other people's priorities for us, to our own feelings and moods of the moment. and to whatever is taking place in our lives at any given moment.

If, on the other hand, our vision is long-range and long-term, we will tend to be guided by the principles which are the foundation of our lives. We will then identify with President Eisenhower who said, "*The important is seldom urgent, and the urgent is seldom important.*" We will begin to give attention to what is really important - our priorities - instead of to what is demanding our attention at the moment.

This is relevant to stewardship in a church. If your vision of stewardship is limited to next Sunday's offering or to an annual financial campaign, your actions will be based on that vision as you move from crisis to crisis.

If, however, your vision has been expanded to a long-term and long-range perspective, then you will realize the importance of training people to be stewards so that they will grow into people whose stewardship lifestyles will not only affect next Sunday's offerings, but will affect everything they do with the resources God has given them for the rest of their lives.

Like Water on the Rocks

We have all seen how a gigantic boulder can crumble over time as water gradually erodes, expands, contracts and cracks it. There is a similar effect with the Scriptures. A biblically based stewardship program is based on the Word of God. Week after week, month after month, and year after year, the Word in the Scriptures is proclaimed in many ways. Like water on rocks, the Scriptures can have a powerful effect on even the hardest of hearts.

The goal of any Biblically based stewardship program is not to bring about revolution in giving patterns (even though sometimes that does happen for some people); rather it is to bring about an evolution. We certainly are not trying to cause people to suddenly give more by creating anxiety, guilt or other compulsion. Instead, we are trying to bring about a change in heart attitude so that Christians will be trained by the Scriptures to be stewards so that time, talents and treasure are all seen in their proper relationship of God's ownership of everything.

We do this through the Biblical pattern of instruction as described in Isaiah 28:10, “**...line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little.**” That sounds like water on a rock.

Here is a list of stewardship Bible passages that may be useful to a pastor:

Exodus 25:2 - Giving with a willing heart

Exodus 36:2-7 - Giving to the Lord in abundance

1 Chronicles 29:3-4 - personal treasures are given to the temple

1 chronicles 29:19 - Giving to God what He has given to us

Psalms 37:21, 26 - Giving generously

Psalms 50:23 - The value of sacrifice and offering

Psalms 54:6-7 - Giving out of gratitude for being saved

Psalms 112:5 - Blessings on generous people

Proverbs 3:9-10 - Honor the Lord with your wealth

Proverbs 22:9 - Blessings for the generous man

Malachi 3:8-10 - Stealing from God

Matthew 5:23-24 - giving with a pure heart

Matthew 6:2-4 - Private stewardship

Matthew 6:19-21 - Treasures on earth and treasures in Heaven

Matthew 23:23 - Giving to the fullest

Mark 4:24-25 - Those who are given much and those who are given little

Mark 12:13-17 - Taxes

Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4 - The offering of the widow

Luke 3:11 - Sharing with others

Luke 6:38 - Abundance repays those who are generous

Luke 12:33-34 - Selling what one owns for the poor

Acts 10:2 - The example of the devout centurion

1 Corinthians 4:2 - Being faithful to the One we work for

1 Corinthians 16:2 - Giving on the first day of the week

2 Corinthians 8:1-5 - Persecution brings an overflow of joy and generosity.

2 Corinthians 9:6-7 - Sowing and reaping

2 Corinthians 9:10 - God rewards the generous

Galatians 6:6 - The student sharing with the teacher

Hebrews 13:16 - Share with others

1 Peter 4:10 - Using your gifts for the good of others