

CHURCH OF GOD

STEWARDSHIP
AND GIVING



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IN THIS ISSUE

- Teaching on Scriptural Giving
- Ten Steps to Financial Freedom
- Livestream Your Worship Services
 - Discipling Youth in Summer
 - 400th Anniversary of the KJV



A Solid **FOUNDATION** *for a Stewardship Ministry*

■ by STEPHEN LEE and JON BENNETT

1. Stretch beyond rational thinking.

By definition, faith is irrational, and great leaders understand this.

That's precisely why those same leaders are not intimidated by the "rationality" of information and facts. Faith continually creates an alternate reality—seas that split apart and ocean floors that become escape routes; jars that pour out gallons more without ever being re-filled; and "church functions" that end up with more food than when they started!

A church in Atlanta that I had a chance to partner with in 2010 was able to purchase an eight-acre tract of land for just over \$360,000. Two years earlier the church made an offer on that same piece of property, and the owners would not budge off their \$1 million plus price tag. Consequently, the church saved nearly a million dollars!

Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind (John 9:32 ESV).

The miracles of Jesus served several divine purposes, but here in the Gospel of John, it seems that the sole purpose of this specific miracle was meant to stretch the limits of rational thinking!

Oliver Wendell Holmes said, "One's mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimensions"

2. Generous people lead happier and healthier lives.

"One recent study suggests that generosity makes the pleasure centers in the brain light up like an entertainment center. When participants were given \$128 of hard cash along with the choice to keep it or donate it to charity, the reward centers of those who chose to donate went wild.

Multiple studies have demonstrated a phenomenon known as the "helpers high," which causes individuals aiding others to experience improvements in mood, immunity, and overall well being. That's why your instincts for sympathy and generosity turn out to be a good investment in your health and happiness too ("5 Gut Instincts You Shouldn't Ignore," *Experience Life*).

When people think about making charitable donations, the reward centers of their brains dole out higher levels of dopamine—the pleasure neurotransmitter. . . . It seems we're hardwired to be generous, and as a side effect, we feel happier (*Vim & Vigor*, Summer 2010).

Those who donate money also reap emotional benefits. A study in the *Journal of Science* analyzed the spending habits of 600 adults and how they related to the participants' happiness.

"We hypothesized that spending money on other people may have a more positive impact on happiness than spending money on oneself," researcher Elizabeth Dunn wrote. "Participants who were randomly assigned to spend money on others experienced a greater happiness than those assigned to spend money on themselves." (*Vim & Vigor*, Summer 2010).

3. The key to giving is staying open to receiving.

"If you give and then try to stop the receiving that comes back, you're like King Canute watching the tide roll out and commanding it not to come back in" (Bob Burg and John David Mann, *The Go-Giver*, New York: Penguin Group, 2007).

One of the most important principles of giving that every ministry leader must embrace is this: "All giving starts with receiving."

King David learned this principle firsthand as he watched in amazement how the people responded to the need of building the Temple. In 1 Chronicles 29:14, he cried out . . .

"But who am I, and who are my people, that we could give anything to you? Everything we have has come from you, and we give you only what you have already given us!"(NLT).

The principle is this: *Receive to give, to receive more to give more.*

When you boldly live this way as a pastor, God's people will step up by giving towards your vision above and beyond anything you could imagine!

4. Think faith-raising, not fund-raising.

A bright-eyed young man wearing a Cub Scout cap approached me one Saturday as I exited the local Lowe's Home Improvement Center. He had both hands full of popcorn and cookies to sell to compassionate souls who wanted to support his cause.

I am very familiar with the scene. In fact, I have been there, done that, and own several "fund-raising" T-shirts! Honestly, as I looked at that young eight-year-old entrepreneur, my first impression was to tell him, "No thanks."

But fortunately for this young man and the Cub Scout organization, his shrewd mother, who stood a few feet away said, "Tell him we take donations also!" Well, I was impressed, and I put \$7.00 in his jar and told him good luck!

That is fund-raising in a nutshell; giving out of a sense of obligation towards a cause you may or may not really care about. We certainly have all been there!

Faith-raising, on the other hand, is investing in a world-changing vision with the expectation of God-sized rewards at the end. Faith-raising is beyond the guilt of "donation obligation" and is based on both vision and expectation.

Every world changer knows this reality; people will give out of a sense of obligation or a sense of vision and expectation.

5. Communicate your vision in a clear and compelling way.

Proverbs states, "Without a vision the people perish." The same is true in *communicating* a vision. Bad communications, of even a good vision, will always lead to a poor outcome and discouragement. It will also work against your effort to build a culture of generosity.

It is pleasing to the Lord to help your potential major donors and the congregation see and understand your God-size vision with clarity *before asking* for financial commitments. Deep buy-in and ongoing joyous giving to any "faith-raising" endeavor will require an investment into a high-caliber, compelling communications campaign. Professional-level stewardship materials will help you rally all God-led givers to an exciting and deeper understanding of what God has done, what He is currently doing, and what He is calling and challenging the church to trust Him for the journey ahead.

Stewardship materials should make an impact: *"that quality in communications that strikes against the receiver and enlivens his/her mind to embrace a calling and to take action."* If you are being led to a vision that will stretch your church beyond rational thinking, you must develop a communication program that is diverse in its various items to make an impact on the congregation. Items incorporated in a well-planned, faith-raising stewardship effort may include the following: a vision brochure, pastoral letters, Q & A trifold, prayer bookmark, newsletters, devotional journal, a pledge card, and videos.

Faith, prayer, a commitment to the Word, good leadership, wise coaching, top-shelf communications is another means of God's grace to accomplish something great for His kingdom. A Spirit-led approach to trusting God in your church's stewardship ministry will develop an ongoing *culture of generosity* that will last! ■

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