

Offering an Annual Stewardship Emphasis (program, campaign)

As a pastor teaches and preaches on the full counsel of God's Word, he will want to spend much time on helping and encouraging God's people live out their faith as it relates to money. While pastors find it easy to talk about using our God-given time and talents for God's purposes, there is often a hesitancy to give attention to money. Perhaps one of the reasons for a pastor's reluctance to address this topic is that, when he does, he is apt to hear from one or more of his parishioners, "All he talks about is money." Yet Jesus Himself spoke often about the subject of money and possessions and how Satan uses our lack of understanding and our unsound attitudes in this area as a tool to separate us from a relationship with Jesus. Certainly those in the pews should be eager to learn what Jesus has to tell us about our finances.

An annual stewardship program that is Scripturally-based and grace-centered can help to teach God's view of money and how we should view it as well. Only the Holy Spirit, working through God's Holy Word, is capable of changing us from self-centered to God-centered stewards. Through faith, we know all of our gifts are from God, the motivation to give is from Him, the cause to support is His, and the promise to bless gifts and the givers is His.

What Are the Benefits to Offering an Emphasis?

- Members will grow spiritually as they hear the "Old, Old Story of Jesus and His Love."
- Members will grow in their gratitude for all of God's blessings, especially the gift of Jesus. Thankfulness will become a way of life for us.
- Members will better understand they are stewards, not owners, of all God entrusts to them.
- Members will understand they are God's stewards by His grace.
- Members will understand they are free to manage the gifts God gives them with joy and generosity.
- Members will become more aware of all the different ministries in their church.
- Members will become more aware as to how they can use their time and money to help extend God's kingdom.
- Members will better understand they are instruments through which God works.
- Members will better understand their church's vision for ministry to the lost.
- Members will become more aware of their spiritual gifts
- Members will become more enthusiastic about their church.
- Members will understand that faithful stewardship involves much more than just money. Stewardship is not paying the bills, fund-raising, arm twisting, or meeting the budget. Stewardship is more about raising people than raising money.
- Members will grow in their involvement, commitment, and generosity.
- Members will be encouraged to ask, "How will my faith mature in the time I commit to serving and in my giving during the coming twelve months?"
- Members will discover joy as they serve and give in Christ's name.
- Members will come to a deeper understanding of what it means to live as children of a generous God.
- Members will receive the special blessings that God gives to those who serve and give faithfully and generously.

An Emphasis Increases a Congregation's Offerings:

In his book *Generous People*, Rev. Eugene Grimm provides the following results from his study:

- Congregations whose members were asked to estimate their giving had 30.2 percent higher giving levels than those not using written commitments.
- Congregations that had an annual stewardship emphasis had 23.3 percent higher giving levels than those with no annual appeal.
- Congregations whose members were challenged to consider tithing reported 19.6 percent higher giving levels than those that did not mention tithing.
- Congregations that used all three of these activities had 38.5 percent higher giving levels than those that used none of them.

Things to Consider:

Time of the year to offer an emphasis: The most popular time seems to be the months of October and November, yet more and more churches are starting their year off in January with doing an emphasis. Some churches are doing a spring program, so the timing is optional.

Length of emphasis: The most popular length is three weeks. It would be unwise to offer an emphasis with fewer than three weeks.

Three weeks gives the pastor the opportunity to build on the selected theme, and, if members miss a week, they still receive two weeks of stewardship teachings. If your church calendar allows, you may want to consider doing an emphasis longer than three weeks.

Theme of emphasis: Develop your own theme or purchase an emphasis with a theme.

Money available for emphasis: You will be able to find an inexpensive emphasis with great messages.

Activities to consider: Celebration lunch, cottage meetings, every member visits, pony express, presenting of your commitment forms to the Lord at the altar during the worship service.



Questions to consider in Selecting an Emphasis:

- In the past, has your church offered an annual stewardship emphasis?
- Does your church receive annual commitments from its members?
- What are the needs of the church?
- Do the members understand Christian stewardship?
- Have you been promoting Christian stewardship a great deal or not at all?
- Do your members know their spiritual gifts and are they using them?
- Do your members readily give their time and talents in service?
- Do your members understand firstfruits and proportionate giving and are they giving generously?
- Are your members aware of the many ministries that your church offers?

Suggestions:

If your church has not had an emphasis for a number of years (if at all), you may want your first emphasis to be a whole-life stewardship emphasis, intentionally staying away from an emphasis that focuses on financial giving.

If your church is struggling to get people to commit their time and talents, you should focus on an emphasis that provides messages that encourage the faithful use of time and talents.

If your members are giving less than they are capable of giving, you may want to focus more on financial giving emphases.