

STEWARDSHIP'S 10 COMMANDMENTS®

by

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If it is September, it must be time for the annual stewardship campaign. In September, stewardship committees ask: Can we repeat last year's campaign, or do we have to change the campaign's design this year? Are there stewardship principles that should be in every campaign?

The answer to the last question is yes. There are principles that apply to all effective stewardship campaigns. Following is my list of these principles. I call them "Stewardship's 10 Commandments."

My Stewardship's 10 Commandments follow the model of the Commandments recorded in scripture. The first three commandments rest on biblical and theological principles while the remaining seven are based on the best practices of fundraising.

1. STEWARDSHIP IS BIBLICALLY BASED

Leviticus 27:30-32 admonishes God's people to tithe their wealth as thanksgiving for what God has already given them. Leviticus is not alone when it comes to tithing. Nine other biblical books repeat Leviticus' admonishment and/or condemn those who fall short when it comes to tithing their wealth.

The Apostle Paul does not use the word "tithe" but talks about a cheerful contributor when it comes to stewardship. In 2 Corinthians 9, he lays out three reasons for financial stewardship: 1. The Corinthians should contribute because Paul has bragged about their generosity. 2. God loves and rewards a cheerful contributor. 3. Financial stewardship provides resources for ministry throughout the church.

2. STEWARDSHIP IS A RESPONSE TO GOD'S LOVE

The theology of the Old and New Testaments is that all a disciple of God thinks, says, and does should be done out of grateful thanksgiving for what God has already done for him or her. This theology sets the church apart from every other civic organization that asks for financial support.

There is no question that the church is in competition with very worthwhile civil organizations asking potential contributors for financial support. In order to compete with civic organizations, every congregation must answer the unspoken question, "Why should I contribute to the church and its ministries?" The answer is, "You contribute because God first gave to

you!" No other organization can make this statement. Every stewardship campaign needs to include the strong message, "We contribute because God first gave to us" to set it apart from other civic organizations.

3. STEWARDSHIP HONORS THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS

In Romans, the Apostle Paul lists seven spiritual gifts. (12:6-8). The sixth gift is "...the giver, in generosity..." (NRSV) A congregation offers its members the opportunity to share their spiritual gifts. For example, those who have the gift of teaching are given the opportunity to teach adults and children. Those with the gift of mercy are given the opportunity to minister to those in need of spiritual and physical comfort. Financial stewardship, gives the opportunity for those with the gift of financial giving to do so with generosity.

4. STEWARDSHIP PROVIDES MINISTRY RESOURCES

The word "stewardship" does not appear in the Bible but the word "steward" does. A steward is one who manages another's property, i.e., Joseph manages the storing of grain so Egypt can survive seven years of famine. The church expanded the meaning of steward to include the management of one's life in accordance with God's will. Today, the church uses the word "stewardship" to connote the managing of one's life and financial resources in accordance to God's will.

It is important to note the difference between being a steward of life and stewardship as an annual stewardship campaign. In a congregation, stewardship of life should be a year round emphasis. Stewardship as an annual campaign for fundraising is a short term emphasis on the member's need to contribute and the congregations' need to receive financial support. Congregations that have effective annual stewardship campaigns year after year recognize the need to use the best fundraising practices possible. Using such principles does not diminish the Gospel in any way.

5. STEWARDSHIP CONNECTS GIVING WITH EXISTING AND/OR FUTURE MINISTRIES

At one time, members contributed financial resources if they believed an honest effort was being made to minister to people or achieve goals. In contrast, today's members contribute because of the results being produced by effective ministries. Members con-

tribute to an outreach ministry that feeds and houses 500 families, trains a mom for a job, and makes sure children attend school. Members contribute to internal ministries that offer comfort to those who are grieving the loss of a loved one or need encouragement because of a troubled relationship. Therefore, an effective stewardship campaign highlights the difference a congregation's ministries make in the lives of people. Members do not contribute to budget goals and are not motivated by posters indicating how close pledges are to meeting the proposed budget.

6. STEWARDSHIP RECOGNIZES THREE TYPES OF CONTRIBUTORS

There are three kinds of contributors in a congregation. First, there are tithers. Their motivation is obedience to the Bible's admonishment to tithe. Seven percent of Americans are tithers.

Second, there are those who contribute on a regular basis but do not tithe. This group is divided into two segments. There are those who contribute out of loyalty to a congregation. The longer the tenure of a member the greater the motivation to contribute out of loyalty. Then, there are those who contribute out of a sense of community and compassion. They contribute because of the relationships they have with other members and the ministry programs the congregation delivers.

Third, there are those who do not share their financial resources with a congregation. The vast majority of this group feels their congregation has not met their needs or expectations. It is estimated that up to one-third of a congregation's membership is in this group.

An effective stewardship campaign addresses all three groups within the congregation.

7. STEWARDSHIP RECOGNIZES THERE ARE PLATEAUS IN GIVING

In the second group of contributors describe above, those who contribute but do not tithe, there is a predictable pattern of giving. Members of this group join a congregation and fill out a pledge card in the new member orientation program. Often the pledge is less than what they contributed to their last church. After a year's experience in their new congregation, the new member fills out a pledge card in the annual stewardship campaign. The new member may significantly raise his or her pledge because they experienced community and compassion within the congregation's fellowship. Their pledge may increase the following year as well. At this point, their pledged contribution plateaus and does not change for as long as the individual is a member of that congregation.

One way to encourage members to increase their contributions is to ask them for an actual dollar amount of increase. For example, the congregation needs a 5% increase in giving to provide financial resources for ministry. A member has given \$1,000.00 annually for the last 10 years. This means the congregation is asking

for a \$50.00 increase over the coming year. If the congregation asks for 5% increase, in all likelihood it would be ignored because 5% is seen as too great of an increase. There is little or no effort to translate 5% into \$50.00 or \$1.00 per week. But if the request is for an increase of \$1.00 a week, there is a high probability that the request will be honored. It is my experience that 50% to 60% of congregational members respond positively to an exact dollar amount asked for by the campaign.

8. STEWARDSHIP OFFERS OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE

Ninety-five percent of those who contribute \$1,000.00 or more on an annual basis to a congregation are involved in congregational ministries outside of worship. Their involvement gives them the opportunity to see the good work and the difference the congregation makes. An effective stewardship campaign highlights the benefits of the congregation's ministries and extends an invitation to join those ministries.

9. STEWARDSHIP HONORS TRUSTED LEADERS

Members will contribute to their congregation because they trust and like the congregation's leaders. The leaders may be the pastor, program and support staff, or leading laypersons. These leaders should be asked to endorse the budget for the coming year.

10. STEWARDSHIP HAS AN ANNUAL CAMPAIGN

Congregations that have an annual stewardship campaign receive 23% more in financial contributions than those that do not have an annual campaign. Congregations that encourage tithing receive 19% more than congregations that do not encourage tithing as a model for sharing financial resources. The campaign also involves preaching financial stewardship from the pulpit to support the budget. When a pastor preaches on stewardship two consecutive Sundays, financial contributions are two and one-half times more than when sermons are not part of the campaign. If a congregation combines all three of these components, it will receive 38% more in financial contributions than those that do not have an annual campaign, encourage tithing, and stewardship is absent from the pulpit.

In conclusion, Stewardship's 10 Commandments provide a precise list of what should and should not be in an annual stewardship campaign.

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