

## **Ask, Thank, Tell** by Charles Lane

### **Introduction**

Stewardship has been kidnapped and is being held hostage by a sinister villain named “Paying the Bills.” The goal of this book is to perform a dramatic rescue of stewardship, freeing it from any connection whatsoever to “Paying the Bills.”

The author has three goals:

1. I want to make the case, the biblical case, that stewardship really is all about discipleship.
2. I want to describe a congregational stewardship ministry that can accomplish the rescue.
3. I want to suggest a structure for your stewardship leadership team that is based on three verbs: ask, thank, tell.

### **Chapter 1** *Discipleship, Not Membership*

1. Discipleship versus Membership: Discipleship contrasts sharply with membership. When we talk about discipleship the primary relationship is not with the congregation. It is with Jesus. The role of a disciple, then is to grow deeper in Jesus and to tell others about Jesus.

The disciple’s work includes: a) doing the ministry; b) giving as a part of a growing relationship with Jesus; c) living life in community.

2. **Mission Statement: The goal of our stewardship ministry is to help God’s people grow in their relationship with Jesus through the use of the time, talents and finances God has entrusted to them.**
3. In order for the focus of our stewardship ministry to be the believer’s relationship with Jesus, God’s word must be at the center of all that we do.
4. Re-introduce again the well known stewardship phrase, “Focus on the giver’s need to give, not on the church’s need to receive.

### **Chapter 2** *It All Belongs to God*

1. God has created all that is, and God continues to own all that is. The biblical truth – that it all belongs to God – is the cornerstone of everything we have to say about stewardship. The very word steward describes someone who watches over that which belongs to someone else.
2. As steward leaders, you need to find and utilize ways to help God’s people see God as the source – and God’s children as the stewards – of all that is under their care.

### **Chapter 3**     *Money and Possessions in the New Testament*

1. Jesus talks more about money and possessions than any other topic, except the kingdom of God.
2. Money and possessions can be good, but they also pose a threat. Jesus wants our heart...and nothing less. In Matt 6:24 he says, “No one can serve two masters...you cannot serve God and wealth.” These words sum up the threat of having money and possessions. (He notes: “If you are reading this book, you *are* rich!”)
3. The duty of the wealthy is to take action to alleviate the suffering is a prominent theme in both the Old and New Testaments.

### **Chapter 4**     *Portrait of a Biblical Giver*

1. There are certain characteristics that the Bible lifts up when it talks about giving. Developing these characteristics certainly ought to be the goal all Christian stewards.
2. Since the mission of the stewardship ministry is to help people grow in their relationship with Jesus through their stewardship, then it stands to reason that the goal of the congregations’ stewardship ministry is to lift up these characteristics.
3. The characteristics of a biblical giver are...Giving: a) Intentionally, b) Regularly c) Generously, d) First fruits, e) Proportionally, f) Cheerfully
4. The Bible always calls us to percentage giving. “Give in proportion to what you have received.” See Mark 12:41-44.

### **Chapter 5**     *Practicing Biblical Stewardship*

1. Biblical teaching undergirds everything you do in Stewardship Ministry in your congregation.
2. If congregational life is going to contribute to the growth in people’s relationship with Jesus, then money needs to be a topic of plain open talk. Because of cultural and congregational taboos, there will always be people who want money on the list of topics that aren’t talked about in the congregation.
3. Stewardship leaders need to lead in this regard, insisting that money is not only appropriate, but a necessary topic for conversation.
4. Key in this is the role of pastor. The pastor needs to have a central place in the stewardship ministry and the financial life of the congregation.

The rest of the book is going to suggest a way for a congregation to structure their stewardship ministry. The structure is going to focus on three verbs. These verbs are ask, thank, tell.

Lane encourages congregations to have three subgroups on their stewardship leadership team. Each subgroup would be responsible for carrying out the activities implied by one of the verbs.

“ASK” describes all the different ways the congregation is asked to consider the blessings God has entrusted to them, and how they feel called to respond to those blessings through generous giving.

“THANK” describes all the different ways the congregation acknowledges with appreciation the generous response of those who support the ministry that is done.

“TELL” describes the many ways the congregation is made aware of the wonderful work you do together, and how important each person’s support is to the ongoing work of ministry.

## **Chapter 6    *Ask: The Annual Response Program***

1.     Don’t forget the basics:
  - a. Mission Statement
  - b. Be Biblical
  - c. Never use a budget
  - d. Ask for growth.
  - e. Use of estimate giving cards.
  - f. Be clear and direct.
  - g. Go first class with materials.
  
2.     Plan - Conduct - Fellowship - Thank
  - a.    **Plan** your annual response program – ask some basic questions:
    - 1) What program? When? Who will lead?
    - 2) Develop a time line
    - 3) Recruit more people
    - 4) Order materials.
  - b.    **Conduct** your annual response program.
  - c.    **Follow up** with those who haven’t returned an estimate of giving card.
  - d.    **Thank** all who have returned an estimate of giving card.

3. Analysis of Annual Response Programs (Strengths and Weaknesses)
  - a. Commitment at worship.
  - b. Relay.
  - c. Fellowship meal.
  - d. Dessert and Prayer.
  - e. Home gatherings.
  - f. Home visits.
  - g. Mail.

### **Chapter 7**    *Ask: Making the Pie Larger*

1. Don't limit yourself to an annual appeal in terms of giving. It is important to have giving opportunities beyond the regular Sunday offering.
  - a. Combining giving and serving opportunity.
  - b. Giving from regular income. (vs. accumulated assets)
    - 1) Mission of the month
    - 2) Sponsorships
    - 3) Regular appeals
    - 4) Special needs
  - c. Giving from accumulated assets
    - 1) Capital fund appeals
    - 2) Endowment funds
2. Giving begets giving – additional giving opportunities create interest in new ministries.
  - a. Instead of competing with the Sunday offerings, these additional giving opportunities can actually help create a culture of generosity within the congregation.

### **Chapter 8**    *Improving How You Ask*

1. Motivations for giving (in order of effectiveness)
  - a. Being asked by someone you know well.
  - b. You volunteer at the organization.
  - c. Being asked by clergy to give.
  - d. Reading or hearing a new story.
  - e. Being asked to give at work.
  - f. Receiving a letter asking you to give.
  - g. Receiving a telephone call asking you to give.

2. Focus on the Giver
  - a. Regularly ask yourself the most basic stewardship leadership question, “What can we do to help people grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ through their stewardship.”
  - b. Focus on what meets the needs of the members of the congregation not on what meets the needs of the stewardship leadership team.
    - 1) **Timing:** Make sure you conduct these programs when you will have the attention of the maximum number of people.
    - 2) **Think Generationally:** Younger generations are not as committed to institution, and certainly do not understand financial support of an institution to be their duty. Rather younger generations want to give financial support to those organizations in which they are able to give their time and talents.
    - 3) **Electronic Giving:** Make sure the members of the congregation are regularly reminded of its existence.
    - 4) **Be positive:** At all times and in all places!
    - 5) **Variety is the spice of life:** Make sure that your print materials don’t look the same from month to month, and year to year.
3. Always remember, this isn’t about getting enough money to simply run the church. Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (Mt 6:21) Your stewardship work is about encouraging people to place their treasure in the hands of the One who is the source and owner of all things. When they do that, their hearts will follow.

## **Chapter 9    *Thank***

1. It is important to create a culture of thanksgiving. Thanking should be a part of the culture of every congregation.
  - a. Start with God.
  - b. Plan your thanksgiving.
  - c. Expand the circle of thanks – givers (Find those who have the gift of thanksgiving.)
  - d. Thank everyone at the same time.
  - e. Thank personally.
  - f. Thank immediately.
  - g. Pass on thank-yous
  - h. Hold thank you trips.

2. Some great opportunities to say “Thanks”
  - a. After receiving an estimate of giving card.
  - b. Each quarter along with the record of giving.
  - c. Every gift that is mailed to the church.
  - d. Acknowledgement of community recognition.
  - e. Thanks to volunteers.
3. Giving thanks is as important to stewardship as asking.

## **Chapter 10 TELL**

1. God’s people want and need to know that their giving makes a difference in people’s lives.
2. Telling is important. Telling motivates people to give more generously to your congregation.
3. Telling needs to be both frequent and varied, e.g.
  - a. Congregations newsletter
  - b. E-mails to member
  - c. Your congregation web site
  - d. A stewardship bulletin board.
  - e. Talks in worship
  - f. Bulletin inserts
  - g. Adult education classes.
  - h. Mission fair.

## **Chapter 11 *Organizing for your stewardship ministry***

1. Lane recommends an organizational structure that is built around work groups made up of people selected because of the gifts God has given them. Each work group is centered around the three main stewardship tasks, Asking, Thanking, Telling.
  - a. Think about the spiritual gifts needed for each group.
  - b. Recruit people to serve on the specific work group that will utilize their gifts.
  - c. Empower these groups – turn them loose!
  - d. Make sure these work groups are work groups!
2. The Stewardship Task Force/Committee could function as a steering committee for your congregation stewardship ministry.