



Beyond the Box

| creating a stewardship series
| for the congregation you actually have

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Case Studies



First Presbyterian Church has always been a small country church. There are fewer families than there used to be, but a strong cohort of committed, long-term members. Over the last year, three major deaths have rocked the church particularly hard, both emotionally and financially. This year's stewardship campaign will probably determine whether or not the pastor can stay full-time. The congregation has a strong foundation, but is weary and stressed at this exact moment. What kind of stewardship series might you build for them?





Grace Lutheran Church is growing! Over the last few years, a handful of new members have reenergized the congregation's morale and ministries. However, these new members don't tend to give to the annual campaign, and a few have expressed to you that they like your church "because you don't talk about money." Your treasurer is starting to get antsy, and threatening to get up during worship and remind people that giving to the church is their Christian duty... and you know the tone they will take. It sounds like your stewardship season practices might need to change along with your changing congregation. What kind of series might you build for them?





Second Presbyterian Church is in a relatively stable position. There's enough money and enough people, if not a great deal of energy or enthusiasm. It seems like no matter what you do for stewardship, the same people give the same amount, and everyone seems vaguely relieved when it's over. You're wondering if you could just skip stewardship this year. Your council says that the church has always done it, and so you need to do it this year. What kind of stewardship series might you build for them?





Trinity Lutheran Church has had a rough year. Just before Easter, the longtime music director quit in a blaze of glory, shooting off insults and grievances as he went. He'd always been a polarizing figure, and the congregation has split between his supporters, who'd like you fired for not managing to keep him, and folks who are rallying behind you in response. And now you have to ask these contentious, pissed-off people for money—much of which is for your salary! You'd rather crawl in a hole, but the budget has to be met. What kind of stewardship series might you build for them?



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Twin Oaks Church seems to have a split personality when it comes to money. If there's a special project that needs to be done—recarpeting the sanctuary, buying furniture for a refugee family, sending the teenagers to summer camp—the money flows in. But when it comes to the annual budget, people just don't give. At first you thought it had to be an issue with trusting the leadership, but you've given it your best pastoral investigation and that doesn't seem to be the case. Your people are just really drawn to heroic giving, and disinterested in the regular, boring kind. What kind of stewardship series might you build for them?



Know Your Congregation

A) Worship Style

Which option best reflects your congregation's worship style?

- ☐ We lean formal.
- ☐ We lean informal.
- ☐ We vary our style.
- ☐ We have multiple services with different styles and require flexibility.
- ☐ Other: _____

B) Stewardship Motivation

Choose one: My congregation cares most about generosity...

- ☐ as a pure spiritual practice.
- ☐ as a means to take care of the building, the staff, and each other.

- ☐ when inspired by stories of current mission and ministry.
- ☐ when inspired by stories of potential mission and ministry.

C) Congregational Strengths

From the list below, choose one or two strengths that most motivate generosity in your congregation.

- ☐ We have a consistent history of giving.
- ☐ The congregation cares deeply about this particular church.
- ☐ We have important stories of generosity from the past.
- ☐ The congregation is enthusiastic about current projects or programming.
- ☐ The congregation is enthusiastic about future projects or programming.
- ☐ We have well-formed Christian disciples.

- ☐ We have well-formed Christian disciples.
- ☐ We are hopeful about the future.
- ☐ The congregation trusts the financial practices and choices of its leadership.
- ☐ The congregation is open to new ideas and ways of thinking.
- ☐ The congregation is able to talk about money and financial realities with honesty and transparency.
- ☐ Other: _____

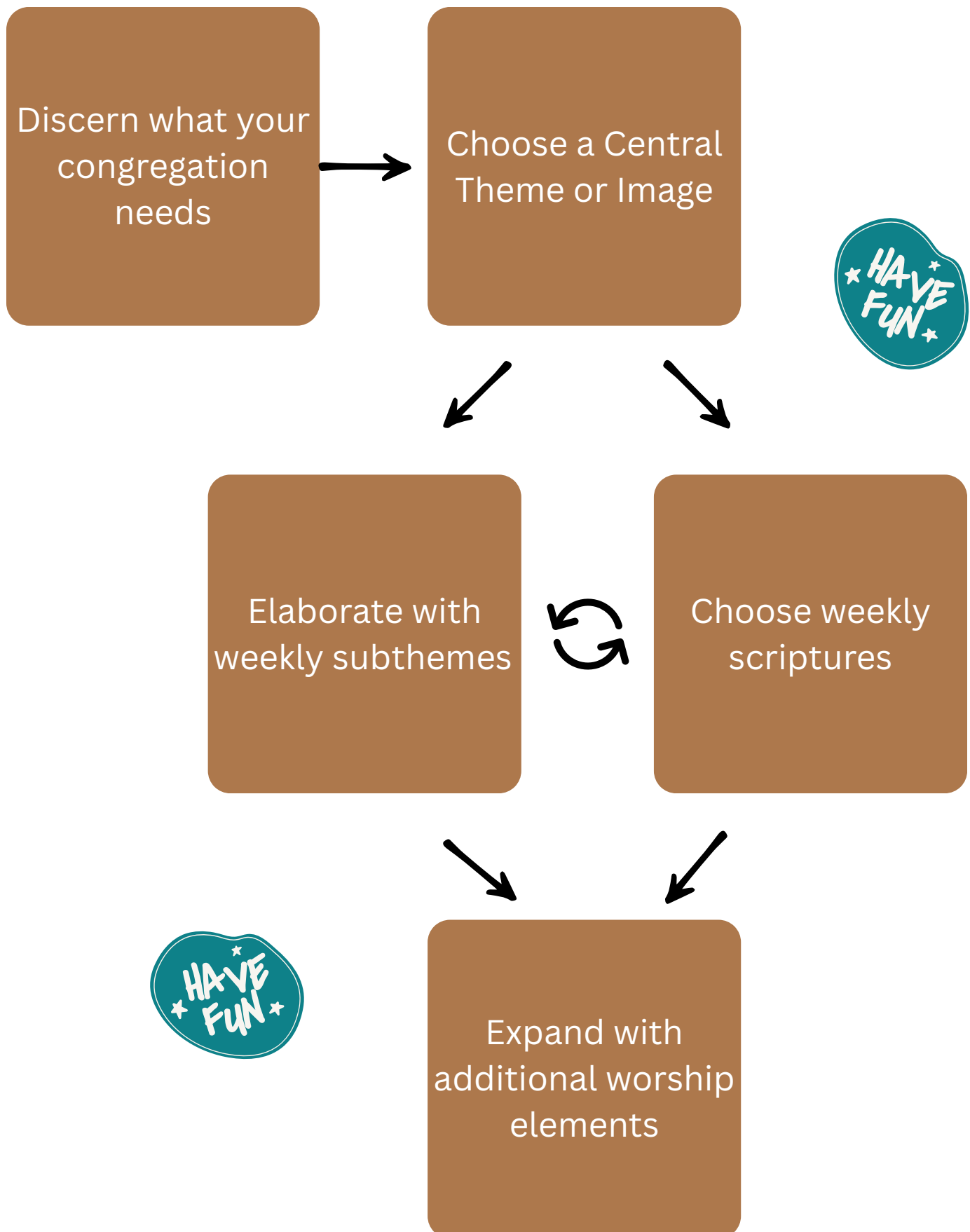
D) Formation Goals

From the list below, choose one emotion or mindset you'd like to strengthen in your congregation when it comes to stewardship.

- ☐ beauty
- ☐ boldness
- ☐ comfort
- ☐ community

- ☐ discipline
- ☐ earnestness
- ☐ energy
- ☐ fortitude
- ☐ hopefulness
- ☐ intellectual growth
- ☐ inspiration
- ☐ justice
- ☐ personal discipleship
- ☐ playfulness
- ☐ pragmatism
- ☐ rest
- ☐ tenderness
- ☐ trust
- ☐ visioning

The Sermon Series Flow



Build Your Sermon Series

1 Choose a Central Theme or Image

Take a few minutes to free think about your emotions and mindsets you've identified.

Your central theme or image could come from a Biblical story, a scriptural phrase, or a common cultural touchstone. Each theme will convey its own mood and tone.

Check your chosen image or phrase against the congregation's worship style. Would it "fit" sufficiently into the environment you already have?

If the first theme you try doesn't pan out, don't give up! This is a creative process. Sometimes it takes a few tries. Generally, the image or phrase that most brings your imagination to life will produce the most effective worship and preaching.

Guiding Questions:

- *If you were going to illustrate your desired emotion or mindset in a picture book, what image would you choose?*
- *If you were going to preach a single stewardship sermon on this emotion or mindset, what title would you give it?*
- *If you were counseling an individual who had requested help deepening the desired emotion or mindset, what scriptures would you point them to? What words or images are in those scriptures?*

Optional Exercise: Formulate a Purpose Statement

A purpose statement grounds the series in its own “why.” It can help keep you from getting distracted by other worthy preaching avenues that are not the task at hand.

The goal of this sermon series is to promote a posture of stewardship by engaging the underlying message of generosity as _____ and the emotions or mindsets of _____ by using the central theme of _____.

2 Build Out Your Weekly Themes & Scriptures

To build out your weekly themes and scriptures, begin with a few basic questions.

- How many weeks will the series be?
- Do I need supporting scriptures beyond my primary preaching text?
- Do I want to stick to a particular book or genre of scripture, or pull from a variety?

There are two paths to choosing weekly scriptures:

Determine your subthemes as elaborations on your central theme. Search for scriptures that speak to those subthemes.

OR

Find scriptures that illuminate your series theme. Allow the individual scriptures to provide the weekly subtheme.

Choosing weekly scriptures requires a deep knowledge of your Bible. While each week should relate to your theme, the scriptures should provide texture and variation. It is often more interesting for both preacher and congregation to engage with less obvious texts, so dig deep!

As you find and arrange your scriptures, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do the scriptures speak clearly and faithfully to the main theme and message?
- Do the scriptures fit the mood of the series?
- Is there enough variation between the scriptures to stay interesting?

3 Expand Your Series with Worship Elements

Sermons are important, but they are only a portion of the whole worship experience. Other worship elements can help fill out a sermon series and provide multiple ways into the message. As you work, always remember the congregation you actually have!

Liturgy

When creating or sourcing your liturgy, focus in on the key words, images, and scriptures of your series. Also consider the liturgy's emotional tone, making sure it's in keeping with the emotions and mindsets you set out to inspire.

You may choose to repeat a particular element each week, either verbatim or with small changes, to really help it sink in to people's minds and hearts. Repetition is a powerful teaching tool.

You may also choose to include or highlight a particular piece of liturgy that speaks most directly to your theme.

Music

Music is the most powerful tool you have for imparting mood and memory! When choosing music, look again for key words, images, and scripture from your series. Pay particular attention to the mood the music creates; most people will remember how music made them feel more than they will remember the lyrics they sang. Keep in mind the way your actual congregation and musicians will interpret the pieces.

Graphics & Sanctuary Arts

Graphics used during worship, on printed media, or in digital media can go far in creating clarity, mood, and recognition. The goal of graphic design is always better comprehension. Keep colors, fonts, and images controlled and repeated. Know your capacity; simple is easier to achieve well than complicated.

Sanctuary arts (paraments, tableaux, art installations, props, etc) can also be really helpful in helping people “see” what you are saying. Again,

work within your capacity, and with your church's actual architecture. Simple and clear is better than cutesy or cluttered.

Additional Elements

You can be as creative as you and your congregation have the capacity for! A joyful series might include a balloon drop; a restful one might include extended periods of silence. You might tie in a mission project, fellowship event, or faith formation class. Make sure your plans are a good fit for the congregation you actually have, and lead from your strengths.

Sermon Series Road Map

As you plan, remember to take into account your worship style, the underlying reason your people will be motivated to give, your congregation's strengths, and what emotions or mindsets you want to bolster in your congregation in order to accompany and undergird their generosity.

Series Theme: _____

Key Image or Phrase: _____

Week One

Subtheme: _____

Main Scripture: _____

Supporting Scripture: _____

Takeaway: _____

Week Three

Subtheme: _____

Main Scripture: _____

Supporting Scripture: _____

Takeaway: _____

Week Two

Subtheme: _____

Main Scripture: _____

Supporting Scripture: _____

Takeaway: _____

Week Four

Subtheme: _____

Main Scripture: _____

Supporting Scripture: _____

Takeaway: _____



Other Ideas

Review the Series

After the series is over, go back and review how it went.

Did the scriptures speak faithfully and accurately to the theme?
Where was there friction?

Was the series effective in shaping, shifting, or strengthening the congregation in the direction it was designed to go? Why or why not?

Were there any worship elements that worked particularly well? Any that I'd want to reconsider?

Did I receive any congregational feedback worth preserving for the future?