



## “Faith & Money” Characteristics during Conflict

Jesus identified the greatest challenge to our spiritual journey as the use of money and the conflict it can create in personal lives and communities. Scriptures tell of His challenge to the rich young ruler to give all his possessions away and of the fishermen who dropped their nets to follow Jesus. These examples invite us into deeper reflection on our relationship with money. Our reluctance to share our history, values and beliefs about money hinders our ability to be in covenantal relationship with each other and with God. Throughout our lives we learn that within this deep spiritual challenge lies great potential for healing, growth and the joyful generosity that enables life and world changing missions.

### Four Principles for Personal and Congregational Financial Stewardship

These four principals offer a framework for understanding the role of stewardship in our lives and in our discipleship journey both individually and corporately. Lack of clarity can contribute to conflict, but deepening the awareness and practices that align with these principals can reduce conflict.

1. Everything is a gift from God.
2. God chose us to be His stewards.
3. As stewards, our priorities mirror God’s preference for “the poor”.
4. Today matters - decisions and actions aren’t put off to later.

### Conflict Happens!

*“It is the chronically anxious individuals in the church family who are apt to conduct a “search and destroy mission.” They will not hesitate to impose their wills on others. They make hostages of their gifts, attendance, and participation. They employ their stewardship as brinkmanship. Their ultimate threat is to run away from home – transferring or terminating their membership if an action is not rescinded, a person is not removed, or a demand is not satisfied.”*

Peter Stienke, How Your Church Family Works, p 22.

Money issues surface during conflict often as a symptom of other unmet needs. Endowments may trigger significant conflict when the use and purpose is unclear. “Savers” and “spenders” will compete with each other believing financial resources only serve one need. Conflict can often be resolved just by listening and honoring different perspectives.

When questions about use of money arise, assumptions of misuse occur and the loss of trust makes communication increasingly difficult. Conflict reduces trust and increases secrecy. However, even difficult conversations like “Should the pastor know what people give?” can occur when covenantal dialogue or circle process skills are practiced.

Because our giving is a faith statement, church finances do not fit all the characteristics of business finances. Good accounting practices are essential, but giving grows because of spiritual growth and inspiring mission activity, not just a numerical increase in customers or services.

Congregational finances are impacted by **Mission Clarity** (knowing who we are and our purpose) and **Information Clarity** (financial reporting and transparency) multiplied by the **Generosity Factor** (spiritual growth in giving). Because “money follows mission”, our bottom line is a moving target adjusting upward as churches invest in missions and in changing lives.